3 4028 08575 1296
HARRIS COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE WRONG KIND OF MUSLIM

An Untold Story of Persecution & Perseverance

QASIM RASHID

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/wrongkindofmusli0000rash

HARRIS COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

303.6 Ras
Rashid, Qasim
The wrong kind of Muslim :
an untold story of
persecution &

$14.95
ocn852794569
11/06/2014

The *Wrong*

The *Wrong* Kind of Muslim

An Untold Story of Persecution & Perseverance

BY

QASIM RASHID

The Wrong Kind of Muslim: An Untold Story of Persecution & Perseverance

by

Qasim Rashid, Esq.
www.twitter.com/MuslimIQ (@MuslimIQ)
www.facebook.com/TheWrongKindOfMuslim
#TheWrongKindOfMuslim
www.qasimrashid.com
q.rashid@richmond.edu

Copyright © 2013 Qasim Rashid
All Rights Reserved

Cover Design: Salman Sajid
Photography: Tayyib M. Rashid
Editor: Anonymous

All rights reserved. This book was self-published by author Qasim Rashid under AyHa Publishing. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any means without the express permission of the author. This includes reprints, excerpts, photocopying, recording, or any future means of reproducing text.

If you would like to do any of the above, please seek permission first by contacting the author at q.rashid@richmond.edu.

Published in the United States by AyHa Publishing
ISBN 978-0-9893977-0-4

Follow Qasim Rashid on Twitter @MuslimIQ to stay up to date on The Wrong Kind of Muslim news. Join the conversation by using the hash-tag #TheWrongKindOfMuslim on social media. Visit www.qasimrashid.com to join Qasim Rashid's email distribution list.

Affiliation Disclaimer: The author has written and published this book in his personal capacity. This book does not represent the official or unofficial views of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, or of any other organization with which the author is affiliated. All errors, mistakes, and omissions are the author's and the author's alone and should not be attributed to any other person, entity, or organization.

To Ayesha, Hassan, and Hashim, whom I love more than words can express.

"There shall be no compulsion in religion." — Holy Qur'an (2:257)

Critical Acclaim

"In his adopted home of America, Qasim Rashid has experienced stereotyping and discrimination as a Pakistani-born Muslim. In his native home of Pakistan, Rashid and his family are subject to persecution because their Ahmadi Muslim faith is considered heretical by many in the Sunni Muslim majority. Rashid's heartfelt story compels admiration for him and a deeper appreciation for America's guarantee of religious freedom."
The Honorable TIM KAINE, United States Senator

"*The Wrong Kind of Muslim* is a significant and alarming book. It tells the story of growing religious intolerance in Pakistan, a nation profoundly important to American security, where the acceptable bounds of faith have become ever tighter in recent years. Victims of persecution have included Christians and Hindus, but also Muslim believers whom Islamists deem heretical. The book demands attention as a passionate call for peace and wide-ranging toleration."
Baylor University Distinguished Professor of History DR. PHILIP JENKINS, Author of *Images of Terror: What We Can And Can't Know About Terrorism* and recognized by The Economist as "one of America's best scholars of religion"

"*The Wrong Kind of Muslim* is a young American's personal journey into his heritage and religion as a vehicle into the history and ongoing phenomenon of faith-based persecution and target-killings in Pakistan – starting with a childhood bullying incident in Chicago. A compelling account, often painful, sometimes uplifting, told with honesty and humor. A must-read for anyone who cares about human rights, humanity, freedom of expression, thought and conscience, not just in Pakistan but anywhere in the world."
Pakistani Journalist and Film Maker BEENA SARWAR, Former Fellow at Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard

---

The Wrong Kind of Muslim is an inspiring book that should be in every high school and college classroom around the world. It educates and motivates its readers, whether in the East or in the West, on how to overcome ignorance and extremism peacefully—even in the face of bitter persecution.
President & CEO, Silicon Valley Education Foundation, MUHAMMED AHMAD CHAUDHRY, Leading Education Advocate

---

The Wrong Kind of Muslim uncovers the layered realities of the intrafaith strife within the Muslim world. By authentically telling the story of Ahmadiyya persecution, Mr. Rashid may have unleashed a torrent of controversy among the religious hardliners who live to define other's faith and fate. This riveting book is guaranteed to leave you longing for more. A must read.
Scholar, Writer, Speaker, Philanthropist, DR. FAHEEM YOUNUS, Founder of Muslimerican.com

---

The Wrong Kind of Muslim is a gripping narrative and a compelling argument. It is a response to the burning question of why religious freedom is worth risking one's life and the lives of one's family. Rashid's beautiful soul shines throughout this page-turner, as does the indomitable spirit of the Ahmadiyya community, ever true to its motto: "love for all, hatred for none." Rashid will win your heart and inspire you, without ever telling you what to believe. He will invite you to share with him, and challenge you to share with the world, the story that is yours alone to tell.
Rabbi MARLA JOY SUBECK SPANJER, Interfaith Activist

The Wrong Kind of Muslim is a candid, harrowing, and deeply poignant account of arguably the most painful social tragedy in Pakistan's national history. In this masterfully told exposé, Mr. Rashid not only gives voice to the silent, but he also eloquently discusses the pathology of terrorism around the world, offering a powerful solution that is both sound and practical. In one word, heroic.
USA President Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association, DR. BILAL RANA, MuslimYouth.org

---

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Critical Acclaim ix

Foreword xiii

Introduction xv

1 Out of the Darkness 1

2 Converting to Christianity 10

3 Living on a Prayer 20

4 The Wrong Kind of Muslim 32

5 The War Within 44

6 Into the Darkness 50

7 Pakistan's Hope 62

8 Three Dollars 73

9 Exporting Extremism 86

10 The ~~Moral~~ Dictator 98

11 Hiding in Plain Sight 111

12 The World's Strongest Dentures 121

13 Shia Suffering & Horrors Hindus Face 129

14 The Sixth Night 138

15 Remnants of a Black Slave 162

16 Brain Drain 172

17 Pakistani Terrorism on American Soil 185

18 The Eighty-Six 189

19 Winning the Hearts 211

Epilogue 219

Acknowledgments 221

Dedications 223

About the Author 225

References 227

Foreword

The Wrong Kind of Muslim is a brilliantly woven narrative of our times. If you want to understand the battle between religious extremism and freedom of conscience at "ground zero", read this book. If you wish to peek into the mindset that breeds the *Taliban*, read this book. And if you wish to learn about the brave men and women who push back against the ideology of violence on a daily basis at great peril to themselves, read this book.

I first met Qasim Rashid when I was a Professor at the University of Chicago and Qasim was starting college. It was clear even then that Qasim is one of those rare individuals who live beyond themselves.

Qasim's passion is freedom of conscience. As I recently learned through him, 5.25 billion people around the world live under some form of governmental or societal religious oppression. It is remarkable how big the problem is and how little voice it gets. *The Wrong Kind of Muslim* is Qasim's first step to change that.

Qasim has a rare knack for striking conversations with strangers. This—as you will see—is a useful trait to have in an environment where many people are afraid to talk openly about the prejudice and persecution that goes on unabated. People open up to Qasim because he genuinely cares. I remember once someone told Qasim that he was facing financial difficulties, and Qasim opened the doors of his house and let him stay in his house for an extended period of time.

Qasim is one of those crazy few who think—rather *believe*—that they can change the world. I have known Qasim for over a decade now and have no doubt that he *is* changing the world for the better. While I have seen Qasim develop into a terrific writer, he remains a man of action. When hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf coast, Qasim packed his bags and left for New Orleans to help those in need. This book is also Qasim's call to action, a call for everyone to come together and fight for freedom of thought.

Qasim is the ultimate freedom fighter. If you read his many writings in the press today, you will find that he courageously fights for everyone's right to freely express their beliefs. No ifs and buts attached. He fights for the helpless Christian woman who is imprisoned in Pakistan on absurd blasphemy charges. He stands up for the atheist blogger who is attacked in Bangladesh for his 'lack of faith'. He repeatedly calls attention to the world's persecuted in the belief that freedom of expression is humanity's most fundamental right.

Qasim is a bigot's worse nightmare. He is a Muslim. But he is not shy to call-out the bigotry of those Muslim countries that prevent non-Muslims from freely practicing and preaching their faith. He is an American, but never hesitant to denounce prejudice against Islam and Muslims in the U.S. He forcefully defends the character of Muhammad against bigoted accusations, but is equally quick to defend Jesus and Krishna. He is the only American I know who wears an "I love Muhammad" cap on his head and carries an "I love Jesus" key chain in his hand.

Qasim is a relentless crusader for peace and *The Wrong Kind Of Muslim* is his coming out party. He is only thirty, but has already become a recognized voice in national media on religion and politics. In an era of 'partisan politics' when most of us are driven by self-interest and narrow agendas, Qasim stands out by going against the grain. He *strives*—or as Qasim would correct me if he could—*Jihads* for all of us, for humanity, and for justice.

The stories that Qasim narrates in this book are very much real. Some of these stories will inspire you and elevate you: Mian Jee's relentless search for inner peace, Danyal's unbreakable spirit in the face of harrowing torture, Yusef's compassion for others even as he lay on the ground bleeding to death. Then there are stories that will bring you face to face with some of the darkest realities of our world today. But above all there is an unmistakable message of hope; as for every Goliath there is a David who refuses to be cowed down.

The Wrong Kind Of Muslim is a story of our times. My prayer is that one day this book is read only as an account of history, rather than a description of present day reality.

Dr. Atif Mian
Professor of Economics and Public Policy
Princeton University
May 28, 2013

Introduction

"*Now renegades are the people with their own philosophies. They change the course of history. Everyday people like you and me.*" — Rage Against The Machine

As we headed home on the school bus the usual taunts began.

"Hey, how come you don't have that red dot on your forehead, you smelly 'Moslem'?"

I bit my lip. "That's Hindus, not Muslims… And I don't smell."

"Well, then I bet you're just a smelly Hindu that won't admit it."

I shook my head and tried to ignore him, not wanting to give him the satisfaction that he was insulting both Hindus and Muslims. I was in the fifth grade. Sitting next to me was Michael, a neighbor boy in the first grade. My younger brother Ahmad sat a few rows ahead. Michael could tell I was getting annoyed, but being too young to understand what exactly was wrong, he remained quiet. The bully continued his taunt.

"And why are you always hanging out with that chink kid?"

I ground my teeth and finally raised my voice.

"Shut up, you jerk! He's in first grade. Leave him alone!" Getting a rise out of me was exactly what the bully wanted. I had no idea what I was doing.

"Oh yeah? What are you gonna do about it, you smelly Hindu retard?" He stood up too.

Michael was sitting in the aisle seat, and I by the window. I was scared. I didn't want to fight. "Come on, Michael, let's move to the front of the bus, your stop is almost here." Ahmad moved over to make room for us. Michael stood up right away and stepped into the aisle. But before I could get up the bully ran towards Michael and pushed him in the back, and pushed hard. Michael went flying forward and hit the ground face first. I rushed to him as fast as I could.

"Are you okay, Michael?!"

Michael was in shock but okay; he was a tough kid. He nodded yes. His face was bruised. He didn't cry, though his eyes had welled up.

"Will you look at that. The smelly Hindu retard is helping his chink friend." The bully walked up to us to make sure I heard him. I turned just in time for him to push me into Michael, knocking both of us down.

The rest was a blur.

Whatever happened next, I couldn't tell you why it happened. I don't remember planning it. But certain things I do remember to this day.

I remember lurching at the bully. I remember grabbing him by the throat with one hand and punching him several times as hard as I could with the other. I remember screaming and the squishy crunch of my fist connecting with his jaw. I remember the adrenaline. I remember blood.

The fight ended what seemed like only a few seconds later. And it probably was only a few seconds. The blood frightened me. I never meant to hurt him. The bully was sobbing and shocked that I'd fought back. He was cowering, perhaps expecting another blow. I looked back to see a stunned Michael—the bus had stopped. Ahmad was silent. The bus was silent. I was stunned too. No one had seen me react like this before. I couldn't believe what I'd done. I felt horrible; sick to my stomach. This wasn't who I was. I didn't know what to do.

In an instant I did the only thing that made sense. I grabbed my bag, grabbed Michael's bag, and we exited. Side by side we walked. Dottie, the bus driver, called out after me but I paid no attention. She'd known me since the first grade, and was always incredibly gracious and kind. I had every reason to trust her. But on that day, I didn't. Instead, I walked. Michael and I walked in silence. I think he turned to me to say something but changed his mind and stayed silent instead. After walking Michael home, I walked home myself, not sure what would happen. Still not sure what I'd just done.

Ahmad stayed on the bus and got home before me. When I got home, I walked in through the kitchen, turned right down the hall, and then into my room. I threw my bag in the corner and sat on my bed, waiting. I waited...for what, I didn't know. But I knew it was coming. And I knew it wouldn't be good.

And then, as expected, it came. The phone rang—the bully's father on the other end.

"QASIM!!" my father called out to me from the den. Now I knew what was coming. My brothers and I got scolded enough for fighting with one another. Fighting another kid, though—I knew I was in a heap of trouble. I was in over my head. I made the dreaded march down the hall, through the living room, and into my father's den. He motioned for me to stand—not sit—and looked at me dead in the eye, and asked the most direct of questions.

"What happened?"

I didn't know how to begin, so I blurted out the first thing that came to my mind.

"He called me a smelly Muslim, and a retard."

My father wasn't pleased with my answer. "And that makes it okay to hit him?"

I insisted, "But he'd been picking on me for weeks!" I didn't mean to but I remember breaking down in tears.

"And that makes it okay to hit him??" He raised his voice slightly. A repeated question was a bad sign.

"Well, no, no, I hit him because he pushed us," I managed to stutter out through blurry eyes.

"Us? And get a hold of yourself."

Sniffle. I tried to force myself to calm down. "Yes, me and Michael." Sniffle.

"Michael, the neighbor's boy?"

"Yes, he called him bad names and pushed him down. He's just a kid." Sniffle.

My father paused for a second. "So he made fun of you about your religion and pushed the neighbor's boy and pushed you?"

"Yes."

"Okay, dismissed."

I didn't wait to ask questions, but left right away and closed the door behind me. Once outside, I listened in as my father called the bully's father back. Moments later I heard, "No worries, no need to apologize, kids will be kids sometimes."

"You can stop listening in, Qasim, come back inside."

I sheepishly opened the door and came back in. This time I sat down. At first we were both quiet. I had stopped crying. Finally, I spoke.

"Am I in trouble?"

My father shook his head no.

"Then…?"

My dad took a deep breath. "Listen, Son. I'll never tell you it is wrong to defend yourself, or your friends. I'm glad you stood up for someone who couldn't stand up for himself."

I knew a "but" was coming.

"But you need to learn that sometimes people won't treat you well. That's part of life."

I asked what any ten-year-old kid would ask.

"Why?"

"Because people are afraid of what they don't understand."

"Well, why can't we make them understand?"

"We can, Son, but not with our fists. Never with our fists."

I paused and shook my head. It didn't make sense.

"Then how? I told him to stop but he wouldn't. And he was bullying me for weeks. What was I supposed to do?"

"You try to win his heart."

"What?" I pouted. I didn't like the answer. It sounded made up. Also, I hadn't much idea of what that meant.

"I don't understand, *Abbu*." ("Abbu" means "dad" in Urdu.)

"You will. Go get your homework done."

"But—"

"Go now before I change my mind."

I silently got up, still shaking my head, and left.

Between the fight, the phone call from the bully's dad, and the not-getting-in-trouble afterwards, I did not understand much of what happened that day. But two things I understood clearly. One, my dad was wrong. Dead wrong. He was wrong because he didn't know how hard I tried to ignore the bully. How long I waited to fight back. He didn't understand what I meant. I didn't understand what he meant. I didn't understand it that day; not the next day, or even several years later.

Two, I was bullied. And as I reflect, this is my first recollection of being bullied because of my faith. But it certainly wouldn't be my last. I highly doubt the bully knew a thing about Islam, or about his own faith, whatever it was. But he knew one thing—I was different. And that was enough for him to berate and belittle. Remarkably, every time I've ever been discriminated against because of my faith, the "bullies" knew little of my faith, and quite often little of their own. Turns out, ignorance transcends age, gender, religion, and culture.

Despite that day's confusion, it (and other experiences like it) initiated a chain reaction of changes in my life. It helped develop the foundation for changes I would never otherwise have envisioned. Changes I could not possibly have understood that day. Over the years, I'd experience similar incidences on account of being the only Ahmadi Muslim in the group. (We'll get to what exactly an Ahmadi Muslim is later.) Fortunately, I had someone come to my side when I needed them. But for countless individuals around the world and in our own backyards—nobody ever shows up to help. Instead, the "different" person is pummeled, mentally or physically, into a deeper hole of confusion, anger, and distrust.

But it does not have to be this way. When we remain united in the face of forces that wish to divide us, the result elevates us to the highest levels of humanity possible. The coming days and months after 9/11 afforded Americans one such opportunity. They say it is in times of trial that a person discovers his true friends. In the days, weeks, and months after 9/11, I experienced such a joy, and such a pain. Certain people I assumed were friends now turned a cold shoulder. Rather than

dwell on the seeming negative, however, I cannot help but embrace the joy of those who embraced me as family.

As with many Americans and people worldwide, the 9/11 tragedy ripped a hole in my heart. My nation was hijacked. My faith was hijacked. My brother Tayyib was an active duty U.S. Marine. Would he now go to war? Would he die? "If I have to go fight for my country and die," he told me when he joined the Marines in 1997, "you're not allowed to be upset. You should be proud that your brother died serving his nation." I nodded that I understood, but I'm not sure I did. I was already upset at the mere thought of it.

But Tayyib was honest. And when he repeated this to me after 9/11, I knew he was serious. Meanwhile, the 9/11 tragedy continued to burn at my soul. But something beautiful happened. Friends reached out as if they were family. I'll never forget the love, compassion, and friendship the Teague and Vandenend family showed me during those trying times post-9/11. My high school coach, Andy Preuss, is another hero of mine for his amazing friendship. It is not something I can articulate in words. They were and are Christian. I was and am Muslim. But together we forged a lasting friendship. They won my heart.

We'll talk about many of these experiences throughout this book—the good and the bad. Because here's the hard reality: the events in this book are not about some faraway land in some oppressed nation "over there." No, they are about our fellow human beings. Our fellow men and women who shed the same blood we shed, love their children how we love our children, and dream of the same aspirations about which we dream.

This is not a story of *them*. This is the story of *us*. And in the global village we call Earth, what happens "over there" affects us "over here," and vice versa. September 11, 2001, is one such example. March 19, 2003, is another. Only those ignorant to the twenty-first century miss this reality. For those of us who get it—which is hopefully more people than not—our only hope at survival is to work together against the universal problem that is oppression of conscience.

Every event related in this book is real.

The people are real, the incidents are real, and yes, even the suffering is real. Those mentioned individuals who are now deceased are mentioned by their real names. They must never be forgotten. Several of those living have been given alternative names for security purposes. Yes, what begins as innocent ten-year-old kids mocking their peers because of their faith grows into forty-year-old clerics, presidents, and dictators

passing edicts of death on others because of their faith. It may occur at different speeds but it all begins with the same ignorance and incivility.

The Wrong Kind of Muslim is a story. It is my story. It is one story. This particular story takes place in America, Pakistan, Canada, the United Kingdom, India, and Thailand. It stems from my birth country—Pakistan—a nation as rich and diverse as any, and traverses across the oceans to the United States. It stands to reason that I provide at least some context into Pakistan. This nation of 190 million is largely comprised of Sunni Muslims. It is also home to tens of millions of minorities, including Shia Muslims, Ahmadi Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Parsis, Ba'hais, Jews, Buddhists, atheists; the list continues. If you were to ask the tens of millions of members of a religious minority in Pakistan, you would likely uncover tens of millions of different stories, each more passionate than the next, and each more painful than the last. While no one book can truly reach the depths of the persecution horrors that exist in present-day Pakistan, this book does its best to provide a snapshot.

What exactly is an Ahmadi Muslim? Simple. Ahmadi Muslims are Muslims who believe in the Messiah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian. I am an Ahmadi Muslim. We believe Ahmad is that Messiah that both Jesus and Muhammad foretold. I offer this for one purpose only—context into why Ahmadi Muslims are so vehemently persecuted. It is for this belief in the Messiah, Ahmad—and this belief alone—that Ahmadi Muslims suffer untold persecution in Pakistan.

Over the past forty years, over three hundred Ahmadi Muslims have been murdered—over 125 in just the past three years alone. The government and vigilantes have destroyed Ahmadi Muslim mosques, expelled their students, denied them employment, refused them military service, revoked their right to vote, prevented them from performing the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca (a pillar of Islam), destroyed their tombstones, and even exhumed deceased Ahmadi Muslims from their graves—only because of their faith.

And while this story, my story, is primarily focused on the persecution of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, it is certainly not exclusive to Ahmadi Muslims. This is because, sadly, Ahmadi Muslims were just the beginning.

As I write this, an eleven-year-old Christian girl named Rimsha runs for her life from the Taliban for her alleged blasphemy.[1] Meanwhile, the *mullah* (cleric) who falsely accuses her goes unpunished. A fourteen-year-old girl named Malala recovers from brain surgery after a Taliban attack left her for dead. Her crime? Malala allegedly violated Islamic principles—she is an education advocate.[2] The body of a missing eleven-

year-old Christian boy in Faisalabad is uncovered—he was murdered, lips and nose sliced, and stomach removed.[3] Hundreds of Christians flee Islamabad, and hundreds more Hindus flee Pakistan. Every day, another Hindu woman is raped, "converted" to Islam, and forcibly married.[4] On Eid ul Fitr 2012, twenty Shia Muslims were forcibly removed from their bus and made to recite a prayer that allegedly only Sunni Muslims would know. Those who recited the prayer were spared. The Shias who did not, or could not, were executed point blank.[5] As far as atheists in Pakistan are concerned, I've been advised they don't exist.

These are our fellow human beings.

In compiling these stories, I have spent several years, traveled tens of thousands of miles and dollars, and researched through countless hours—meeting with individuals in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, India, Thailand, and of course, Pakistan. I visited blood-splattered mosques, touched scars left by gunfire, grenades, and shrapnel, and prayed for the departed at their final resting places. I held a mother's hand as she wept for her son and husband. I trembled as a son related the intimate account of his father's cold-blooded execution before his eyes. I sat speechless as members of my family related what they were certain were their final Earthly moments.

But above all, I sat in awe of the resilience that is the human spirit. The passion that strives us to drive forward and march on. The fortitude that allows us to rise above the viciousness around us, and look to a new day, a new opportunity, a new doorway. This is not just a story of what has gone wrong in Pakistan; it is also a story of what is going right in the world. A revolution to free the millions, or rather, the billions around the world who live under the veil of oppression of conscience. A new revolution of conscience is emerging. It is growing, and it is spreading. And by reading this story and listening to the cries of the silenced, you help further this revolution.

Thus, I thank you for reading this book, as you have made that conscious and courageous decision to make a positive world change. This journey is not easy, nor is the destination near. But this is the right side of history. The side that champions universal religious freedom for all people of all faiths, and for all people of no faith. For this is the single way forward to peace on Earth. We will reach that destination together.

This book is but a step in a journey already a million miles long, with many more to go—but hopefully not too many more. Whatever your philosophy on life, whatever your world view, to whichever God you pray—or do not pray—I thank you all the same from the bottom of my heart for taking this step with me, *The Wrong Kind of Muslim.*

1

Out of the Darkness

"*Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.*" — Voltaire

Did They Have to Die?

They came from hell. On October 7, 2005, 5:00 a.m., three men rode through the dark on dirt roads on a noisy but sturdy motorcycle. Their destination was Mong, a small village in rural Pakistan about one hundred miles south of Islamabad. As they rode through the crisp morning, the cold must have pinched their noses. They wore sweaters for layering. The adrenaline pumping through their veins probably kept them warm enough anyway. Each dressed in dark clothing and covered their faces to ensure their identities remained concealed. They could have been any three men riding for any purpose. But these men, these men in particular rode with a specific purpose—to murder the wrong kind of Muslims.

Each knew his role in the operation, having practiced it countless times. Today was the culmination of their training and preparation. The first man's job was simple—drive the other two, be a lookout on the street, and hit the gas the second the other two returned to the bike. He was the transportation. Just in case, he carried a semi-automatic pistol.

The second two embraced a more sinister role. Both carried automatic Kalashnikov assault rifles, fully loaded, and with plenty of back-up ammunition. Their assignment was also simple—point and shoot, and cause as much death as possible without being captured.

As they neared their destination the sound of the *adhaan* (Muslim call to prayer) filled the dark sky. For some, it would be the last time they would ever hear it. For others, it would begin serving as a permanent reminder of that day.

Meanwhile, Yusef woke up to the sound of the adhaan. A heavyset man in his late forties, he had lived most of his life in Mong. Unlike most Pakistanis his age, Yusef was clean-shaven. He had a full head of hair that he parted to one side. Streaks of gray began to make their presence known.

Yusef was a regular at the mosque, especially for *Fajr* (pre-dawn) prayer. Few could remember his last absence. But this morning, Yusef woke up feeling extremely ill. He tried to sit up but his strength was gone. He had a fever. The night was cooler than he'd anticipated, and he sensed a vicious flu pursuing him. "I'll just pray at home," he tried to convince himself. But something compelled him to go to the mosque that day.

His wife, seeing his condition, tried to talk him out of making the short trek. But, having entered the age when a man's routine becomes sacred, Yusef insisted. He bundled up in several layers, grabbed a cup of hot chai, and began walking. Along the way he met with a man named Syed, Imam of the mosque and principal of the local elementary school. Syed loved his job as a principal—it was a career path that his childhood principal, Mian Sirajudeen, inspired him to pursue. A few steps behind Syed were two brothers, Ashraf and Abid, unknowingly making a one-way trip to the mosque.

As the group neared their destination, a small congregation was already waiting for them outside the entrance. No adhaan was to be called from this mosque on this day, nor on any other day. This mosque's congregants were forbidden from doing so.

"It's about time you arrived, Imam Sahib," one of the elders playfully teased Syed.

Smiling, Syed shook the hands of those waiting while Yusef unlocked the front gate to let everyone in. It was a simple yet elegant mosque. The front gate opened directly into the village's main street. Entering the front gate from the street, a winding path decorated with trees and flowers led up a small incline to the mosque's front door. To the right and behind a curtain was the men's hall.

Due to the growing congregation, funds were being collected to expand the facility by adding a second level. Rather than hiring outside workers, congregants took time off from their day jobs to assist in construction. Inside the front door, to the left and up the stairs, was the new women's hall. Ever present was the smell of fresh cement. The anticipation of an expanded facility created a general excitement among the congregation, and the number of attendees to *Fajr* prayer had steadily grown over the past several weeks. On this morning, roughly fifty men and children entered the mosque and began offering their individual

prayers. Off in the distance, Yusef heard the crackle of a bustling motorcycle. He heard dogs barking somewhere. Otherwise, the night was serene.

All the regulars were present at the mosque, except Dr. Ahmad. Halfway to the mosque, Dr. Ahmad had the sudden urge to return home. When I spoke to him months later about that day, he explained the urge as an unbearable aggravation in his heart. No matter how much he tried, for some reason foreign to him at the time, Dr. Ahmad felt a burning desire to return home that morning. Torn, he turned around and retraced his steps back to his front door. But, he wouldn't remain there long.

The night was winding down, and the earliest rays of sunlight raced to color the sky at any moment. And time was running short. Individual prayers complete, Imam Syed stood up for congregational prayer and walked to the mosque's far corner, facing Mecca, to lead the prayer. "*Iqamat*," he announced loudly with a sense of urgency; it was the request for someone to recite the pre-prayer declaration to inform the congregation that the formal prayer was beginning. Despite his sore throat, Yusef took the honor upon himself as he did every morning. The congregation transformed from scattered groups resting on the ground into straight lines standing in perfect unison behind the Imam. The sound of the bustling motorcycle grew louder yet.

A Perfectly Executed Massacre

Imam Syed raised his hands to his ears and began congregational prayer. "*Allah hu Akbar*" ("God is the Greatest"). In unison, his congregation silently followed suit behind him.

Imam Syed began reciting prayers out loud in Arabic.

"All praise belongs to God alone, Lord of all the worlds."

Yusef heard a motorcycle slow down outside the mosque.

"The Gracious, the Merciful. Master of the Day of Judgment."

The motorcycle stopped at the front gates, which were left unlocked in case any stragglers arrived late. Two men dismounted and one stayed on, keys in the ignition, motor running.

"Thee alone do we worship."

The two men moved swiftly through the front gate, just as they had been trained to. Magazines loaded and safeties off, one stopped at the mosque's front door. His first assignment was to be the lookout should anyone get past the transporter. The other proceeded through. All that separated a fully loaded Kalashnikov in the hands of a madman from

fifty innocent worshippers was a straw curtain that hung helplessly in the doorway.

"And Thee alone do we implore for help."

Syed paused because he felt a loud insect buzz by his right ear. At first he ignored it. "Guide us to the right path—" Syed paused again as another loud insect buzzed by his left ear. He thought he heard someone groan in pain. Before he could react, he heard a vicious rattling sound.

When I visited the mosque a few months later he told me, "At first, I thought a child turned on the fan and jammed a stick inside. But just as quickly I heard another groan and turned around in horror."

His congregation, deep in prayer, was in a state of complete confusion. Unaware of the intruders, Imam Syed had stayed in prayer for the first few seconds of the shooting. His congregation followed his lead; only a few had broken prayer. Most stood their ground, deep in supplication, begging their Lord for help and guidance—remarkably unaware, or unwilling, to realize that they were under attack. Meanwhile, the madman sprayed his Kalashnikov across the crowd, one by one picking off worshipers.

Realizing what was happening, Yusef threw his body over some children near him. He pushed some others behind the several large cement support pillars built to withstand the weight of the second level. Fortunately the madman did not enter past the straw curtain. Considering the short distance he had to fire anyway, it did not make much of a difference.

Click-click-click. His gun jammed unexpectedly; he retreated. Hearing a cease to the gunfire, the second man, standing at the front door, instinctively ran to the straw curtain and the two men switched roles.

"I thought it was finally over, and moved to the first injured person I saw. But five seconds later it started again, another one came back." Syed was moved to tears as he recounted the series.

Off in the distance, Dr. Ahmad thought he heard gunshots, but wasn't sure.

The second gun emerged through the straw curtain, repeating the horror of the first. Shouting obscenities and curses, the madman sprayed bullets in every corner of the mosque, leaving no area untouched. Cement dust filled the air, obscuring the sun's earliest rays that crept through the window. Blood splattered on the straw prayer mats and soaked through.

This time Dr. Ahmad was sure he heard gunshots and made a mad dash for the mosque, sprinting as fast as his legs would carry him.

The second madman's clip wasn't empty before he heard a shout from the first shooter, "Let's go let's go, we gotta go now now now!" His bloodlust not satiated, he let loose one final spray across the crowd. Yusef let out a scream as one bullet sliced through his arm while the second shattered his femur. The children he covered shrieked in fear. Yusef fought to regain composure long enough to ensure the children under him were okay. Thankfully they were. He heard a motorcycle charge up and peel down the street, leaving a long trail of blood behind it. With nothing but the sun chasing them, the three men vanished into the countryside, just as quickly as they'd appeared.

Meanwhile, the wrong kind of Muslims languished. Dr. Ahmad arrived at the mosque moments later, still gasping for air. The carnage was nothing short of horrifying. Blood enveloped the floor. Walls, windows, and pillars—littered with bullet holes. Several bodies lay motionless, eyes open, frozen in a distant gaze. Several more convulsed in agonizing pain, most with multiple open wounds. Children were crying, tears streaming down their cheeks. A thick haze filled the air. Dr. Ahmad's instincts as a trauma physician kicked in.

He grabbed water and ran to Yusef. Yusef declined and urged him go to the next person—Ashraf. Wasting no time, Dr. Ahmad complied. Ashraf had been shot in the chest; gasping for air, he too refused water and motioned to give it to his brother Abid.

Confused as to what motivated these men to refuse water, Dr. Ahmad moved on. Abid had been shot several times, though it was difficult to tell where. His entire body was already soaked in blood. He began to feel cold and numbed with pain; the severe blood loss was making it difficult for him to keep consciousness. Like Yusef and Ashraf, Abid's thoughts were not of himself, but of others. Despite Dr. Ahmad's pleading, Abid pushed the water away and pointed courageously to the next person.

Dr. Ahmad again complied rather than argue. The next two people he reached, Altaf and Majeed, were also regulars to the mosque. Bright individuals, both were known for their hospitality and passion for keeping the mosque clean. Now, that mosque was stained with their blood. When the doctor reached them, they had already returned to their Maker. Dr. Ahmad bit his bottom lip as tears welled in his eyes. He put his soft hands over their eyes, and closed them for the final time. Forcing himself to stay focused, he moved on to the next group of injured worshipers, Lahrasab and Aslam.

Lahrasab was hemorrhaging heavily and Aslam wasn't doing much better. While both were unaware that Yusef, Ashraf, and Abid had

rejected the water—they too rejected the water, urging Dr. Ahmad to take care of others first. Dr. Ahmad, although becoming increasingly frustrated and desperate that he was losing his patients, insisted, but they continued to refuse—urging him to help those who were in more need of assistance. Dr. Ahmad knew that Lahrasab and Aslam were lying about their condition, but there were too many injured to waste time.

Blood mixed with tears washed away the dust that settled on the worshipers' faces. Imam Syed followed Dr. Ahmad's lead; he grabbed water and quickly phoned other congregants to come to the mosque immediately. Within minutes, dozens more arrived with blankets, bandages, and whatever basic medical support they could grab in their frantic dash. Police were nowhere to be found.

Dr. Ahmad came across two young men, Naveed and Yasir. Both lay motionless, unconscious, coated in blood from gunshot wounds. Fearing the worst, he checked their pulses. A glimmer of hope leapt into his heart—a faint, sluggish pulse in both called out to him.

"They're alive! Naveed and Yasir are alive! We need to get them to the hospital now!"

Several young men came quickly to the two, carefully lifted and wrapped them to transport them to the nearest hospital, several miles away.

Meanwhile, Dr. Ahmad continued his fateful rounds—wrapping and bandaging whomever he could get his hands on. Imam Syed returned to Yusef to give him water but he again refused, assuring the Imam that he was okay. The Imam called a young man to wrap Yusef's arm and leg tight to stop the bleeding. The children remained with Yusef, too afraid to move.

Ever present was the fear that the shooters would return. Realizing this possibility, Imam Syed posted several young men outside the front gate as a precaution. "This will have to be a daily security measure now," he thought to himself. The police were still nowhere to be found, despite several calls alerting them of the attack.

Satisfied that Yusef was being tended to, Imam Syed looked down to see a streak of blood mixed with cement. Following the streak, he found Ashraf, who had since managed to drag himself to his younger brother, Abid. Lying on their backs, clutching the others hand for strength, both brothers lay motionless, with a look of euphoric peace in their eyes. Imam Syed arrived with water, but destiny had other plans. The two brothers rested comfortably on their backs—hand in hand. Their bleeding had stopped, but so had their hearts.

Fighting back tears, Imam Syed whispered a prayer for them and moved rapidly to Lahrasab and Aslam with water. They had declined water from Dr. Ahmad the first time, and now could not answer Imam Syed this second time. The blood loss was too extensive. They both slipped into unconsciousness. Begging God to spare them, Imam Syed checked their pulses just in time to feel their quickly weakening beats slowly dissipate into nothingness. A few moments later, they breathed their last.

Syed wept.

The Aftermath

"In the end, they killed eight of my brothers, and shot twenty more."

I listened silently as Yusef related the events of that day several months after. We were in a hospital in Rabwah, a growing town a few hours from Mong. It was January 2006 and I was visiting family during a tour of India, Pakistan, and Europe. It was my first time returning to my nation of birth in a dozen years. Part of me was horribly ashamed. Every passing moment I further realized how little I knew about my own family, about my own ancestry, about my own community's persecution. When I heard Yusef was at a local hospital for treatment, I made my cousin Danyal take me to see him. Danyal, a respected Islamic scholar and probably one of the most intelligent people I've ever known, knew just about everyone in town and arranged for our meeting. (Danyal isn't his real name.)

Yusef lay in his bed, still unable to walk on his shattered femur. When I first walked in to Yusef's room, his eyes lit up. By my attire he knew I wasn't a local. Danyal introduced us and despite Yusef's injuries, he insisted on embracing me with his one good arm. At least a dozen pins jetted out of his disfigured and scarred leg. Several more pins claimed his injured arm. He had lost weight since the attack, still had trouble sleeping, and struggled through hours of painful physical therapy a day. He would probably need crutches for the rest of his life, or alternatively, a wheelchair. Given his age, the prospects of a full recovery seemed dim. Still, he was in surprisingly good spirits.

"But wait, that doesn't add up. I counted six martyrs. How did we get to eight?"

Yusef paused and took a deep breath. "Naveed and Yasir... By the time we got them to the hospital, they had just lost too much blood.

There was nothing the doctors could do. There wasn't...it just wasn't meant to be."

I nodded in understanding and winced. I also made a mental note to donate blood the next chance I got.

"Did you ever regret going to the mosque that day? Did you ever think, maybe I was sick for a reason—maybe God was trying to tell me something?"

Yusef shook his head no with conviction. "I thank God every day that He gave me the strength to get up and go. If giving my limbs meant the two kids behind me get to live, I say it's a great bargain." He smiled. "I mean, now I can literally say that kids cost me an arm and a leg!" I smiled. "The only thing I regret is that the culprits were never caught. The police made no effort to find them. It's no surprise. They were probably in on it anyway."

Yusef's statement caught me off guard.

"In on it? As in...they knew about it beforehand?"

Yusef looked at me confused. "Where do you think you are?"

"I guess the obvious answer is Pakistan but—"

"Yes! This is Pakistan; we're not even real Muslims here. Do you think the government cares what happens to our people?"

I let him continue speaking.

"Do you realize that the police only showed several hours later?"

My cousin Danyal shook his head in dismay, perhaps recalling a decade prior when police tortured him (I promise we'll get to that later).

"So then what was the government's response?"

"They tried to buy us off."

"Buy you off? How so?"

"The family of every person killed received one hundred thousand rupees from the federal government...as compensation for the lost lives."

As a typical American I couldn't think in terms other than dollars and cents. Some quick math in my head arrived at about sixteen hundred dollars. By Pakistani terms, that meant enough for a family of four to survive for four months.

"So the federal government offered one hundred thousand rupees for each life the terrorists took. What'd you guys do?"

"We gave it away."

"You what?"

"We gave it away. We told the government we didn't want their pity money."

"Then what'd you tell them?"

"We told them to change the laws that declare us constitutional *kafirs* [infidels]. Repeal the laws that suppress our freedom of religion. We told them that if they just do that, then we'll be happy and that the attacks would also stop. Otherwise, we didn't need their pity money."

"So you just gave the money back to the government?"

"No, I said we gave it away. The day after the attack, on October 8, an earthquake struck northern Pakistan that killed eighty thousand. Our town lost eight lives and our nation lost eighty thousand more. It was devastation upon devastation. So we did what we could. Every family gave every penny from the government to the relief efforts."

The idea seemed noble, but also impractical. I told Yusef so.

"That's quite noble but didn't you guys need the money?"

"Money? No, we didn't need money. We don't need money. No...we needed to give it to those who needed it most. That money wasn't going to bring back the eight lives we lost. But maybe it could save some lives that would otherwise be lost because of the earthquake. Besides, it's a matter of principle. We don't need charity from a government that has no value for our lives. God is our provider, not them."

It occurred to me—not by financial comparison necessarily, but by example of how different governments treat their citizens—that the average family of a 9/11 victim received anywhere from 1.1 to 3.1 million dollars.

Yusef continued, "If the money we donated saved even one life, then it was more than worth it."

"I'm certain it did, Yusef, I'm certain it did."

I looked at my watch and saw I'd been there for almost an hour. I looked up. "God bless you, Yusef, I hope you get better soon. With your permission, I think I should get going."

Yusef smiled and embraced me again. It was a smile I won't soon forget.

I visited that mosque in Mong a few days after meeting Yusef. The blood splattered walls remained. I met mothers who lost their sons. Sons who lost their fathers. Sisters who lost their brothers. I stood in front of eight somber graves, one belonging to a young man who was only sixteen. To date, the Mong attack was the most vicious single massacre of Ahmadi Muslims in the community's then 116-year history.

Those terrorists believed absurdities—namely the absurdity of murdering in the name of Allah—and committed the most heinous atrocities as a result. But in the annals of history, Mong was just the sneak preview.

2

Converting to Christianity

"*I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway and see it through no matter what.*" — Atticus Finch, Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird.

As I reflected upon the Mong massacre, I realized what seems obvious now—it was inevitable. I wouldn't find solace until I embraced it as a fact. The more I tried to avoid thinking about the horrors that went inside that mosque that morning, the more it drilled deep into my temple. The frightening precision, the conviction to kill, the sense of "serving the cause of Islam" through murder—it weighed on my mind.

Above all was the heaviest question: Why choose to live such a lifestyle? No, not that of the terrorists. Terrorists are by definition irrational. My question focused on those murdered brutally. Why live a lifestyle subject to open persecution, one in which at any moment, a terrorist could come barging through your door, light you up, and leave you choking on your own blood. Meanwhile, the government sworn to protect you validates the terrorist's act and blames *you* for offending the terrorist. Why not just remain low-key, walk the safe path, and ensure you'd be around to watch your children grow up?

At twenty-three, I felt comfortable in my beliefs, or at least I thought I did. After all, I'd never been tested with a gun to my head like those in Mong were. Mockery—like the bully from my childhood—was about the extent of it. And mockery, though non-violent, can have a powerful impact on how people practice their faith. I've met Muslim women who choose not to wear the *hijab* or head covering because of how the public might negatively perceive them. I've met Muslim men who choose not to wear a beard for the same reason. I've met Muslims

who drink alcohol, though Islam forbids it, to appear more social with co-workers.

And I've met some Muslims who stop practicing Islam altogether because they cannot reconcile their understanding of Islam with logic. And such was my trial growing up.

As I reflected on the Mong massacre, I recalled the closest I ever felt to that frustration of whether everything I've ever believed was a lie. Some of you know the feeling I'm describing. It is suffocating. You don't know who to talk to or how they might react. If you ask the wrong person, you are unfairly judged as "weak of faith" or a "troublemaker." You don't know where to turn. You second guess even the most basic "realities" you've ever known. It is a horrible experience. And one Chicago summer, it was my turn to live it. It caused me more confusion than I've ever known. It was dreadful. It was painful. It was humiliating. And it is a cherished memory I would not trade for the world. While I did not know it at the time, it was another life-changing moment that built the motivation for this book.

In 1997, I was fifteen and enjoying my first job—ever. It was the summer between my freshman and sophomore year in high school. I made a whopping $6.70 an hour, a full $1.45 above minimum wage, as a deli clerk at a grocery store. It wasn't a terrible job. But I often worked late and couldn't yet drive, so I had to walk home nearly two miles several times a week. I've always loathed walking. I love running more than I can explain. But walking, forget about it. It isn't something I can explain. Still, by 1997 standards, $6.70/hour was handsome pay for a fifteen-year-old—too good to pass up.

It all happened one fine summer day while I was slicing roast beef for one of our regular customers. And I hated that it happened to me for a long time. My supervisor Tom, then unbeknownst to me, was a die-hard evangelical Christian. I didn't quite know what "evangelical" meant at the time. Since then, I've developed relationships with evangelical Christians based on genuine friendship. But Tom was different. He was relentless. At fifteen years old, I was a shrimp, hardly 5 feet 1 inch tall, and possibly 120 pounds. Tom stood a solid 6 feet 3 inches, and was well over two hundred pounds. He was slightly heavyset with blondish hair parted to one side. He wore a plastic smile and overdramatically flipped his hair off his forehead whenever it got in the way.

Tom struck up what I thought was an innocent enough conversation.

"Hey, Q, so you're Muslim, right?"

My high school cross-country coach, Andy Preuss, nicknamed me "Q." For some reason it followed me around after that everywhere I went…and does to this day. I'm Qasim with a Q.

I thought nothing of Tom's question so I replied as anyone who considered themselves Muslim would. "Yep."

He continued. "I'm Christian."

"Cool." I still hadn't looked up.

"You ever study the Bible?"

"Mmm, no, not really."

"How come?"

"I dunno, because I'm not Christian I guess." I turned to the customer. "Sir, did you want a pound or a pound and a half?"

"Um, I think I said a pound and a half…yeah, let's go with a pound and a half."

"No problemo, coming right up." I turned to Tom while I continued slicing—a big no-no when working with a live blade. "So yeah, sorry dude, haven't really read the Bible much."

"Well, I've studied the 'Koran.'"

He suddenly caught my attention. Why would a Christian study the Qur'an?

"Really? How come?"

"Because I heard it mentions Jesus and I wanted to know why."

It sounded like a good enough reason. And while I didn't know much about Christianity, I was sure I knew the basics. I decided to flex my pathetic religious knowledge muscles. "Yeah, but we believe Jesus wasn't God himself, only a Prophet of God. Because God can't be a man." Tom had a scripted answer ready to fire.

"Oh, I know what you believe, but doesn't the Koran say that God breathed His Holy Spirit into Jesus?"

He caught me off guard. "Ummm, maybe?" I honestly had no idea. He knew I had no idea, and moved in fast.

"It does, Chapter 21 Verse 91. Your 'Aaallah' says He breathed His Word into Mary and Jesus was born."

I was taken aback. I could never quote the Bible like that, and hardly the Qur'an. "Uhh, okay, I guess I'll just take your word for it. What's your point?" I was starting to feel uncomfortable.

"Well, my point is that your Aaallah doesn't say He breathed His word into Mohammad's mother, only Jesus' mother, right?"

Again, I had no idea whether he was right or wrong. But my discomfort was rising like the mercury outside. I finally mustered a shallow, "So?" My voice cracked. Damn puberty.

"Well by the Koran's own admission, Jesus is made of God's word, just like the Bible says."

"Yeah well, but the Qur'an says Jesus is a Prophet." I insisted.

"No, no, that's what *you* say. In the Koran it says Jesus is God's Word. And the Bible John 1:1 it says that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word *was* God. You see, the Word *was* God! And the Koran says Jesus is the Word! And you know the Koran came after the Bible. So the Koran is simply reaffirming that Jesus is God!"

I was dumbfounded. My mind went blank as I tried to think of a response. I couldn't. "Hello! Hello, sir! I have to get going. Is my order ready?" My customer was getting annoyed.

"Oh, sorry, I'm sorry, sir, here you go; that'll be $5.45." I wrapped and delivered the roast beef. The customer paid and left in a huff. He'd overheard the whole conversation. I turned back to Tom. Frantic, I said the only thing that came to mind. "I don't believe you, you're lying." I bit my inside lip. What a stupid and immature response. But Tom was relentless.

He flipped his hair to the side. I hated that flip. "Look, Q, the truth hurts, I know. I was once lost too. But Jesus saved me. He can save you too if you believe in him as Lord."

I gasped. "Tom, dude, this is dumb. I'm not converting to Christianity."

"Why not?"

"Because." I didn't have a good answer. "Just, there's just no way the Qur'an says that." I felt my heart pounding, my mind racing, desperate to think of something to say, something to get him to shut up, something to let him know he hadn't cornered me. But nothing came out. Accusing him of lying was the best I had.

"Okay, fine, don't take my word for it, go read it for yourself, I'll even write down the verses for you. But when you see I'm right, you'll know that Jesus is your Lord."

I scoffed, more than I'd intended. "You know what, I'll do just that!" He'd given me an out and I jumped on it, as pathetic as I sounded. And on the inside I gloated. Little did he know whom he was dealing with. He had no idea my father was a Muslim scholar who—in my eyes—could beat anyone in a debate. Because that's what it was all about—winning debates. It would be a cinch to ask my dad to prove Tom wrong when I got home that night.

But first, I needed to look up the verses Tom cited. By the time I got home that night after a trying two-mile walk, the suspense was killing

me. Smartphones have spoiled us. A smartphone back then meant you had caller ID—and we marveled at that.

Everyone was asleep when I walked up the stairs to our apartment. I let myself in quietly, hung up my keys, took off my shoes, and bolted to my room. My Qur'an sat in my closet on the top shelf. A cloud of dust lifted off the cover as I pulled it down. (Just went to show how much I read it myself.) My Qur'an had a blue cover and both the Arabic and English side-by-side on the pages. I flipped to 21:91 just as Tom said. I pointed with my finger to pinpoint the verse until I found it. And there it was.

My jaw dropped—Tom quoted the Qur'an perfectly.

I tried to think of a rational answer but couldn't. Maybe it was out of context? It wasn't. I needed an out but had nowhere to go. Tom was right. Everything I knew was wrong. But this couldn't be. The feeling of frustration was intolerable; it was painful. "Was I in the wrong religion?" I thought to myself. "No, it couldn't be…no, no, there's got to be a perfectly good explanation for this." I tried to convince myself, but I couldn't find a way to deny what was staring me in the face. In my short fifteen years of life, that night was one of the longest.

The Complaint

I wasted no time the next morning. "Abbu, we need to talk."

He didn't bother looking up. "What about?"

"I had a really bad day at work yesterday because this guy Tom, he's my boss actually, was harassing me about being Muslim."

Now he looked up at me, concerned, and leaned forward. "Really? Tell me what happened."

"Well, so he spent the whole time proving that Jesus is God and that Jesus is greater than Prophet Muhammad."

"Hmm, okay, go on."

"He said I should convert to Christianity. Isn't that ridiculous?"

"Okay, interesting. Tell me what he did to harass you about being Muslim. Did he call you names?"

I got frustrated. "Abbu. What are you not understanding here? He is trying to prove Islam wrong, and as far as I can tell, he proved Islam wrong. That's messed up."

My dad realized that I wasn't actually harassed about being Muslim but was just complaining about losing an argument. He sat back and went back to reading his paper. "So what do you want me to do about it?"

"Well, obviously, I need you to show me how I can prove him wrong."

"Prove him wrong about what?"

"Christianity. I need you to prove him wrong and prove us right."

My dad paused for a minute. "You want me to prove to him why 'we're right' and why 'he's wrong,' is that right?"

I nodded.

"That's what I thought. Sorry, Son, no can do."

I did a double take. "Wait? What? No can do what? What no can do?"

"I can't do what you're asking. Go figure it out."

"Figure it out? Figure what out?"

"Figure out if he's right or not. This is not my problem, it's yours."

"Wait wait, what are you saying? Are you refusing to help me here?"

"Oh, I am helping you, Son. I'm telling you to stop being a child and go find out if he's right or not."

"Abbu, this is the most bizarre thing I've ever heard. I am finding out. I'm coming to you. You know we're right so just tell me how I can prove him wrong."

My dad shook his head. "No, Son, I know what I believe and why I believe it. You don't know what you believe, and that's why this is bothering you."

"Yes! Thank you for stating the obvious, Abbu! So just tell me what to believe and make Tom stop bothering me!"

My dad paused and shook his head. "It doesn't work that way, Qasim. No one can tell you what to believe. And I certainly won't. You're a smart kid. Go figure it out."

I was at a loss for words. And if my dad said "figure it out" one more time, I was going to scream. "So you're not going to help me? This is dumb."

Suddenly, a brilliant idea came to my mind. Something he couldn't risk happening. This was so obvious, it was checkmate. I boasted, almost threatened, "Well, what if I convert to Christianity?! Then what?" I had him. I knew he had to jump in now.

He hardly looked up. "If that's where you find peace, go knock yourself out."

"Abbu! That's the worst advice ever! Jesus isn't God and you *know* he's not God! Why won't you just help me?!"

My dad sighed and finally put down his paper. "Son, I may know, or I may not. God gave me my own mind and my own conscience. And when I die, I'll be accountable for that. If you believe in God, then understand that He gave you your own mind and your own conscience too. I'll tell you how to behave and force you to behave with morals and integrity if I have to, because how you behave means how you treat other people—and I'll see to it that it's with respect."

"But Abbu!"

"Let me finish. You're not a small child who needs to be told what to believe. I won't force you to believe in any religion just because I believe it. You're not a robot to be programmed. You're a person with a mind of your own. You'll be judged on your own. So when it comes to religion, it's between you and God. If you want to find truth, go find it."

"But!"

"But," he continued without missing a beat, "if you want to spend your life just proving other teachings wrong, then what you believe isn't a belief, it's being a blind follower. And you don't need me for that. In fact, you don't need anyone for that. You just need the desire to remain ignorant. Because those who believe blindly believe ignorantly. And that's a dangerous way to live."

For the second time in as many days, I was dumbfounded and speechless. I was frustrated and didn't yet appreciate my dad's advice, or his lecture. I was angry, but for the sake of discussion I conceded, "So what do you want me to do then?!" I demanded it more than asked it.

"Go use that thing called a brain to study with common sense. Then, wherever you end up, it'll be because of what you experienced, not what you were told to believe."

He could tell I wasn't buying it.

"Look, not everyone on Earth has the freedom you have to study with a free mind. People are killed for their beliefs. Don't take this freedom for granted. So go, figure it out." With that he was done talking.

I stood there for a moment, then begrudgingly nodded and moped back to my room. And of course, but a few days later Tom and I were at work together, and his questions once again started. And again, he was relentless. This time I knew what was coming, and knew ahead of time I had no answers. And it wasn't long before I was cornered again, and asked to accept Jesus as my Lord. Once again, I balked in frustration.

It wasn't long before I stopped talking to Tom—and not just because I couldn't answer his questions. Though if I had my way I would've loved to never have to answer him again. The summer wound down and school started up. As active as I was in school activities,

keeping a job was impossible. And since I made sure to shop elsewhere, I never really saw Tom again. I felt like a coward. Maybe I was.

I had no idea what Islam was anymore. Tom was gone but his questions remained and my frustration grew. My dad was a brick wall and I really had no one else I could turn to. I finally realized I had no other choice. I had to face what I feared—studying other faiths. I'd never before considered the fact that I had the ability to research and study different beliefs and do so without fear, compulsion, or oppression. It seemed so obvious but when something has been granted so readily for so long, we often forget how meaningful it actually is. Likewise, when we're stuck in our comfort zones for so long, it isn't easy to step out. What was once my comfort zone had quickly become my discomfort zone. For me, realizing I didn't really know what I believed was frightening, and with the countless questions swirling around in my head, I knew I wouldn't last long like this.

And so, taking my father's advice, what began as a conversation over sliced roast beef transformed into some of the most intense research I'd ever done. It lasted weeks, then months, and then over the next several years. I attended Catholic Mass on Christmas Eve, meditated at Buddhist temples, and visited Sikh Gurdwaras and Hindu temples. I attended church with one of my childhood Christian friends—Lamorne Morris. I remember well that I enjoyed the sermon. Lamorne also graciously attended my mosque with me; someone in the mosque spent the entire time debating him. I remember being furious at that person and feeling embarrassed in front of Lamorne. I'd been treated so well at his church, and he'd been ridiculed at my mosque.

I attended Willow Creek Church and Holy Family Church in the Chicago suburbs—two of the largest churches in the Midwest. I took religion classes and learned from Rabbi Marla Joy Subeck Spanjer (who, by the way, is one of my heroes). We worshipped together at her synagogue. She kept me honest, kindly calling me out that I needed to work even harder at studying different faiths. I don't think I ever thanked her for that, but perhaps it isn't too late.

I met with former Muslims who converted to Christianity and former Christians who converted to Islam. I spent time with believers who became atheists and with atheists who became believers. I read Karen Armstrong, Lee Stroble, Richard Dawkins, and various Muslim thinkers. And just for the heck of it, I debated religion with friends based on my growing knowledge—for and against Islam. I was fascinated with how easy it was to push people out of their comfort zones. I realized how easy it was for Tom to push me, and how terrible it felt. I made a promise

to myself to never put another in that position. And as far as Tom's questions about Islam were concerned, I eventually found answers that satisfied both my mind and heart. If you're wondering what those answers are, as a great person once told me, go figure it out.

To this day, some fifteen years later, I cannot exactly say my journey is over, but I can say that my journey has yielded fruits. My beliefs—whatever they are—are not arbitrarily based on my parents' beliefs. In fact, they and I often debate religion with each other and disagree. Rather, my beliefs are based on experience, my experience. And my attitude remains to continue searching for truth wherever I may find it. I can say with conviction that my father pushing me to perform my own study is the single greatest gift he's ever given me. Were it not for that, who knows what type of person I would have ended up as. This is a journey I recommend to every person on Earth. It wouldn't be until years after my journey that I came across the aforementioned Voltaire quote—but when I did; I appreciated it all the more.

While discarding the absurdity to believe just because that's what you were "told to believe," I've discovered two important truths these past fifteen years. First, I've discovered that we all have much more in common than in disagreement. Those commonalities can be a basis for friendship and strength. They are a basis for us to conquer ignorance and apathy. They are a basis for peace.

Second, I've discovered that despite our substantive differences in dogma, no excuse exists for religious hatred, oppression, or fear of one another. We need not gloss over our differences. Instead, we must recognize and celebrate them—as that is how we truly value people for who they are.

But—and there always seems to be a "but"—as great as this experience has been, it is not entirely complete. This experience taught me a great deal about countless faiths and ideologies, and even more about myself. But, it limited me to the value of personal freedom I've enjoyed as an American, in America. It taught me nothing of seeking out that freedom of conscience in a nation where I would be deemed the wrong kind of Muslim, and hence worthy of death. Despite my experience, after Mong the question remained: In the face of terrorism, why not just remain low-key, walk the safe path, and ensure you'd be around to watch your children grow up? Had Tom held a gun to my head, perhaps I would have politely conceded my faith. After all, I only believed what I believed because that's what seemed convenient. So what if I had to change to spare my life? Having gone through the journey I had, I wasn't so sure how I'd now respond to compulsion in matters of

faith. Would I have the courage to stare down the barrel of a gun and remain firm?

I needed answers. After Mong terrorists destroyed my brethren, I felt the same frustration that I did after Tom destroyed my beliefs. On a different scale, certainly—but similar confusion. And part of my trip to Pakistan was designed to continue my journey, and to discover these answers.

Turned out things were just getting interesting.

3

Living on a Prayer

"*The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be.*" — Ralph Waldo Emerson

About a week after my emotional visit to Mong and meeting with Yusef, I found myself in my uncle's home, reminiscing over a cup of chai. My uncle, Bashir, was then seventy-four years young and healthy as they come. He was, or rather, is, a stout man with a solid frame, and wears a modest silver beard. Born to a Sunni Muslim family, he joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the early 1950s as a young man of twenty-one. He'd seen his fair share of personal grief. His first wife died while giving birth. He remarried, and she too died of a sudden illness. He was only thirty-eight then—he never remarried. Today, he's comfortably into his eighties.

We sat in his living room, across from each other, each on our own *charpai*. A charpai is a wooden cot—popular in Pakistan. His grandchildren (my nephews and nieces) chased each other back and forth through the room. Though he'd seen his fair share of grief, he also had much to smile about and is an upbeat and gentle person; he was a father of five and grandfather of nearly twenty.

My uncle lived in Pakistan his entire life. He was old enough to remember its birth, its growth, and its sad decline. As a young man he dedicated his life to teaching, even forgoing a promising career in politics in the late 1960s and '70s. He'd seen the wars through which Pakistan suffered, and the causalities of war, particularly between Pakistan and India. He'd lost personal friends in those wars and to martyrdom. He'd suffered with them. It hit me that he was the perfect person to grill.

"Uncle Bashir?"

The anxiety in my voice must have surprised him. Slightly startled, he looked up.

"Oh, sorry. Listen, Uncle, I... This has been tearing me apart..." I paused, realizing I was unable to articulate myself properly in Urdu. He understood English just fine; in fact, he taught it for years. But when you're in your birth country speaking to your family elders, you play by their rules.

"I have a question and it's hard to describe."

He nodded, indicating he was attentive.

"I've been thinking about the Mong martyrs."

"Right."

"And I'm trying to understand, why do they, why do you, deal with all this garbage in this country? Those people in Mong could've lived a normal life; nothing said they had to be vocal about their faith. They could've lived comfortably and been around for their families, for their kids, for their futures. Now they're dead, and for what?"

Uncle Bashir nodded slowly, absorbing what I'd said.

"I understand they're proud of their faith but in a nation like this, it just doesn't make any sense. Why not just change to live another day? I was thinking that—"

Uncle Bashir cut me off. "Did I ever tell you about the night your father was born?"

My uncle was eighteen years senior to my father. He was basically like another father to my father.

"No, I don't think you have but can we talk about that later? I'm really curious to know your thoughts on freedom of relig—"

"Well, let me start from the beginning with the story about a man who inspired me to become a teacher. It was a man everyone knew as Mian Jee. Did I ever tell you this story?"

I contemplated protesting again. But something told me he was going to tell this story regardless of what I did. I slumped back in my charpai.

"No, Uncle, I don't believe I've heard this one."

He smiled. Sensing I was unsure about where this conversation was going, he added, "What happened back then is why you're asking me this question today."

Intrigued, I got comfortable on my charpai and relaxed for the moment.

"Well, it all started back in 1929, before Pakistan was even possible, before I was even born."

Lurking Danger

It was a difficult time. Mian Jee was in danger and up until the moment it happened, he didn't even know it. He was twenty-one years old and the sole breadwinner for his two-year-old son, wife, and blind, aging mother. While Americans suffered through the Great Depression, Mian Jee suffered as the victim of another financial scam. His father was a well-to-do businessman and unexpectedly died. He left Mian Jee a healthy inheritance. And that's when the problems began.

Mian Jee's father's business partner vanished, as did the company's assets and cash. All the debts, meanwhile, were left in Mian Jee's name.

Before he could react, the debt collectors came knocking and knocking and knocking. It didn't seem like Mian Jee had much of a choice. He chose to work, and he worked diligently day and night to pay off the debt that wasn't his. Rest was an afterthought. He'd often feel a burning sensation in his chest and finally realize he hadn't eaten all day.

He wasn't alone, however—his wife, and even his blind mother, did whatever work they could to help pay off the debt. Now, Mian Jee wasn't Ahmadi. In fact, he was born in 1908 to a largely agnostic family. They weren't averse to religion per se, but religion was just not an important part of their lives.

A year went by in this frenzied state to pay off the debt. One evening in July 1931, Mian Jee came home to find his wife, Beiji, ill.

"Are you okay?" Mian Jee asked.

"Yes…I expected this, of course." Beiji managed to smile.

"When?"

"February."

Inspired by his growing family, Mian Jee continued working at breakneck speed. He wanted nothing more than to free his family from economic slavery. And things were going well. The debt, while still substantial, was slowly decreasing. He was in a regular routine. For the first time since his father died, life was becoming normal again. His wife noticed it too, as did his mother.

But the joy was short-lived, as the next turn showed them that they weren't quite out of the woods yet. Mian Jee was a well-built young man but one morning he awoke feeling weak. He thought it was just a lack of sleep and went to work anyway. The weakness soon turned to body aches, the body aches to throbbing pain. A brutal fever and relentless coughing compounded the pain. By the time he arrived home in the evening, Mian Jee had fallen morbidly ill. He crawled into bed without food or even saying much of anything.

To be clear, there were no hospitals in the area. Considering where Mian Jee lived, hospitals were a long shot. In his family's modest home in the small Punjabi village of Muradwal, they had no telephone, no running water, and no electricity. Summer nights the heat inside became unbearable. Mian Jee would sleep on a charpai on the roof. A cool breeze off the nearby canal acted as a godsend. Off in the horizon were orchards in almost every direction—mangoes, grapes, pomegranates, guavas, berries, and oranges. Wheat and corn also claimed much of the fertile soil. A grape tree stood in their front lawn. Entering the front gate to their home from the dirt alleyway, the property sloped downward and to the left. At the bottom of the slope rested their one story house with three rooms—the kitchen, a bedroom, and a living area. The bathroom was an outhouse a few yards from the main structure, closer to the front gate. An eight-foot tall brick wall surrounded the fifth acre lot. Steps on the side of the house led to the roof, where Mian Jee would often spend his nights, gazing at the brilliant display of stars above him. The soothing moonlight would blanket the Indian countryside with a healthy silver glow. A donkey or cow would complain every so often if a fox frightened it. Otherwise, the nights were serene.

That was early twentieth-century India.

Obviously, a hospital was a far cry, and Mian Jee was in desperate need of one. And just as surely as the sun set that evening, it rose the next day. When Mian Jee awoke, however, the sun had already perched itself at high noon. Normally, he was out of bed at the crack of dawn. In a sudden panic he tried to move but the excruciating pain kept him down. He lay there motionless. Beiji, hearing the shuffle, came in from the neighboring room to check on him.

"Why didn't you wake me?" Mian Jee said, his voice barely above a whisper.

"I tried! You're ill. Here, I made some green tea. Sit up and drink some."

"What time is it?"

"It's past noon. Here, just don't speak; sit up and drink."

Mian Jee tried again to move but couldn't even lift his head. Every time he swallowed he felt a vice tighten around his head to the point that it was unbearable.

Eventually, Mian Jee's reputation would become that of an extremely noble man—the man that inspired my uncle to teach. He loved to read, and saw to it personally that his neighbor never slept hungry—no matter what. He would go on to become an educator, and served as a

principal of a school for decades—a school where he taught Imam Syed of Mong. He would make his late father proud.

Until now, Mian Jee's character was hardly admirable. He lost his temper often—particularly with his wife and mother. If he disliked the food placed before him, his wife would spend the next thirty minutes cleaning the floor, because that is where it usually ended up. He was arrogant.

And now he lay in agonizing pain, contemplating if this was it for him. In a third world country with deplorable living conditions and virtually no access to healthcare, his illness worsened. Doctors [read: village elders who had simply been around longer than most] were unsure of the diagnosis, and his condition worsened each day. It was only a matter of time, they said. None of their medications—home remedy or allopathic—had worked. None of them were sure what to do. They were all sure, however, about one thing.

Mian Jee was going to die.

For some, it is hard to comprehend that even several days later, it was too difficult to get him to a hospital. Many in the West have never lived a life without even the most basic of luxuries—roads, streetlights, cars, police, water, heat. *None* of those things were available. If those basic things weren't available, who would build an entire hospital in a rural area, hours from the nearest major city?

All this amounted to the undeniable fact that Mian Jee was on his deathbed. People die all the time. But dying wasn't danger for Mian Jee. The danger was in the consequences of his death. While his creditors certainly couldn't chase him into his grave, he was not alone.

Indeed, 1931 India is not twenty-first-century America. In a nation of then 280 million people, no support existed for the working middle class, let alone for the indigent and destitute. Welfare was a far cry and the most basic of social programs did not exist. Women had no rights, and Muslim women in particular were considered an even greater nuisance in a strongly caste-based society.

Mian Jee knew that if he died, the fate of his wife, blind mother, young son, and unborn child would be sealed. They would either starve to death—or arguably worse, be forced into slavery and human trafficking. After all, Mian Jee's debt still lingered.

On his deathbed, his world collapsed around him. He had no money, no worldly supporters. He had no assets he could sell, nor any life-saving doctors he could pay. He could hear the cry of his young son, hungry for food that would soon run out.

They say a man's true character is revealed when he stands face-to-face with his mortality. It was something Mian Jee often contemplated, especially after his father's sudden passing. It was nothing he had truly understood. And with nowhere left to turn and being forced to finally stare his mortality in the eye, Mian Jee did something he'd never truly done before.

He prayed.

When I first heard this, I objected. To me, it was a total cop-out. How can a man be agnostic his whole life and then suddenly turn to a god he doesn't even know exists? I felt it was an entirely legitimate criticism. And were he to use that as "evidence" for others to believe in God, I still say the criticism is legitimate. As I soon learned, however, that wasn't Mian Jee's purpose at all.

Still, the thought lingered. Who's to say whether his prayer was sincere or not? And again, upon further reflection, I realized the simple answer: no one. Because that's just it. It is between him and God and no one else. No one else has the right to intervene.

Mian Jee knew well what would likely happen to his family through no fault of their own. He prayed to God, Allah, Yaweh, or Whoever was listening that if he got another chance, he would find Him. He would unearth every stone, research every book, and study every claim to find God as God saw fit.

Mian Jee was literally living on a prayer.

It was the last thing Mian Jee remembered, as in the process, he lost consciousness. His family stood around him in stoic silence, stunned at what they thought was the inevitable. His wife embraced his mother, both unsure of what to do. His young son put his hand on Mian Jee's face, trying to get his attention. He did not respond. Finally, his wife called out to him, to wake him—but to no avail. She grabbed his arm and chest and shook him, tears streaming down her face.

But Mian Jee could no longer hear them.

Mian Jee's Jihad

It was a long night. Mian Jee perspired profusely, even more than before. His fever worsened. Beiji did what she could to keep him cool, placing cold towels on his forehead, keeping his long dark hair moist. And his fever worsened.

A few hours passed, then a few more. And then, a few more yet. Mian Jee lay on his bed, motionless. His breathing had not improved—it

remained weak and irregular. His fever blistered. And he slept. He slept longer than usual, even for his illness, sweating profusely throughout.

The night ended and the sun threatened to break through the horizon. But Mian Jee slept. Sunlight transformed the dark sky into a brilliant red, then yellow, then blue. But Mian Jee slept. The sun reclaimed its position at high noon. But Mian Jee slept. And after what seemed like a visit to the darkest depths of hell and back, something remarkable happened.

Mian Jee opened his eyes.

He saw Beiji smiling down at him. He could see what he thought was dawn—but it was actually the sun setting. His clothing was soaked and he felt cold. But something was different. His fever had subsided some and his intense body aches had lessened. He could speak again without pain.

He could see the look of relief, and exhaustion, in Beiji's eyes. She hadn't slept the entire night, nor the entire day, tending to him with the affection only someone truly in love could or would.

"Don't move, Mian Jee... Just lie right there. I'm making some chai."

He managed to let out a thank you and wanted to keep talking, but she put her finger on his lips.

"No, no talking, just rest." She left the room momentarily, returning with his chai.

With some difficulty, but much less pain than before, Mian Jee sat up, at least for a few minutes. He drank the chai and changed his soaked shirt. A few moments later, sleep overtook him again and he was out for the night.

In the coming days Mian Jee regained his strength. Like a child relearning to walk, he staggered on his first step—Beiji was there to support him. She was his strength. He was twenty-four years young, and in his prime.

In early 1932, resurrected and rejuvenated, Mian Jee began his new journey. As the sun rose that morning, the front gate to his home opened, and out walked Mian Jee. He had escaped death's clutches, at least for the time being. He had gotten his second chance. He knew though, he would not rest until he fulfilled his promise.

When Finding God Loses a Family

Mian Jee began his personal Jihad to find God as God saw fit. Sincerity in one's personal faith is perhaps the most valuable gift

someone can give to himself or herself. His journey to recognize the importance of this gift was not an easy one, and his journey to appreciate its value fully was not any easier.

Mian Jee's journey took him through every major religion, ideology, and world philosophy. He studied under different scholars, different sects, and different forms of secularism. A few months passed, then a couple of years. He continued relentlessly in his search for God. Early on he came across the writings of one Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, a man who claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah and Mahdi for humanity.

It intrigued him enough to continue his research but he kept open to opposing dogmas and ideologies. In the meantime, Mian Jee continued to work relentlessly to honor the debt thrown upon him. By now he was establishing himself as a reliable school principal. Parents who wanted to ensure their child learned went out of their way to send their kids to his school.

He was becoming well-liked and well-known in the surrounding community—with the exception of his neighbor, Abdul Rahman. Abdul Rahman, another teacher—albeit not as well known or respected—always despised Mian Jee. Perhaps it was jealousy. Whatever the reason, it did not stop Mian Jee from acting benevolently towards him. He was the neighbor that Mian Jee ensured never slept hungry—despite Abdul Rahman's insults.

Beiji, meanwhile, was not amused that her husband's research inclined him to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's explanation of Islam. Those who accepted Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the Messiah were pejoratively known as "*Mirzais*" or "*Qadianis*." They were loathed and chided for accepting what populist mullahs termed as "*kufr*" or "disbelief."

This was also a time when the title "mullah" had quickly transformed from a title of honor and prestige to anything but. Mullahs, or clerics, increasingly began to represent an intolerance that has today become all too widespread.

At first Beiji ignored Mian Jee's research, hoping he would perhaps lose interest. Quickly realizing that that plan wasn't working, she then tried to reason with him. One night, as he came home from work, she cornered him.

"This has gone on long enough, Mian Jee. I appreciate your desire to become a godly person but this is getting out of hand. You can't seriously consider becoming a Mirzai?"

To put it in perspective, Mirzai was (and is) similar to *nigger* for black Americans or "camel jockey" for Muslim-Americans. I'm one of

the "lucky" ones who have been called a Mirzai, Qadiani, camel jockey, and sand nigger. You learn to smile and move on.

Mian Jee ignored the insult and politely responded, "I'm just keeping my options open. It might be the truth I've been looking for, it might not. I don't know yet, I'm just trying to find out."

"Okay, this is ridiculous. What you're researching is nonsense. I can't believe we're even debating this!"

"That's your opinion and I respect it. But this is a promise between me and God, and I need to fulfill it myself."

Part of what frustrated Beiji so much was that regardless of her anger, Mian Jee never reacted in kind. He merely smiled and lovingly explained his perspective—making it all the more difficult to stay angry. Mian Jee's mother, however, was not deterred so easily. When she discovered her son was reading heretical literature, she was furious. But true to his character, Mian Jee would merely smile, listen to his mother respectfully, and go about his business.

Granted, they were non-practicing; an agnostic family. Why did Mian Jee's family suddenly care that he was researching Islam? The reality was, agnostic or not, no one wanted any association with Mirzais. It was one thing to treat your religion casually—never pray, fast, give charity, etc.—but it was a different thing altogether to convert to what they saw as a different religion. And risking becoming a Mirzai was just that. It was embarrassing. And Mian Jee's mother continued scolding him and was quite a bit more vicious now.

"Even if you became a Shia I wouldn't be happy, but I wouldn't be this upset. I would eventually accept it. But why, why become a Mirzai and leave Islam?' Mian Jee's mother asked.

Mian Jee sighed. He sat down beside her and began gently massaging her feet—a sign of respect in Indian culture. "Mother...you well know there's nothing on Earth I wouldn't do for you."

She knew a "but" was coming.

"But what you're asking me to do is not a matter of this world. This is between God and me. All I can ask is that you understand that."

She remained silent at first, then begrudgingly nodded, more out of obligation than affirmation. Mian Jee kissed her forehead and left the room.

She sat silent for a moment, but already had other plans to get her way.

"Rehmat, come here, I need to speak with you." (Beiji's full name was Rehmat Khatoon.)

Beiji came in from the other room, having overheard the entire conversation.

"Rehmat, this is beyond our control now. We need to plan another solution to get him away from this Mirzai business."

"Well, what do you have in mind?"

"Why don't you call his friend Imam Ali and see if he can talk some sense into him?"

Beiji agreed. Master Imam Ali was a fellow schoolteacher and Mian Jee's close friend. Both trusted one another immensely, always consulting the other for advice, particularly on important life decisions. His mother sent an urgent message to Ali, explaining that her son was being influenced by Mirzai propaganda. Receiving the message, Ali replied that he would visit as quickly as he could.

I Get By with a Little Help from My Friends

It was getting dark when Mian Jee heard the knock on his front door. The knock surprised him. Mian Jee opened the door and much to his delight, his dearest friend stood in the flesh.

"Ah, Imam Ali, what a pleasure, come in come in," he said as he moved to the side and extended his hand.

Ali embraced Mian Jee's hand and walked in, smiling. Ali was a young man, just a few years older than Mian Jee. He had a soft demeanor about himself and liked to smile. He wore a turban in public and kept a healthy beard. He was a caring and compassionate person, and he valued Mian Jee immensely. In fact, though Imam Ali was the elder, he still referred to his younger friend as Mian Jee. It is odd in Indian culture for an elder to refer to someone younger than himself or herself in such a formal and respectful manner. But Master Imam Ali seemed to ignore this supposed cultural norm.

"You didn't tell me you were coming, is everything okay?"

Imam Ali paused for a moment. "Yes, yes, everything is fine; I don't come bearing any bad news if that's what you're wondering."

"Well, I'm glad you came, will you have chai?"

"I'm actually in a bit of a rush so perhaps next—"

"Okay, chai it is, I'll go get some and we can relax on the roof. I'll meet you up there."

Smiling, Ali had no choice but to comply and made his way onto the roof, where a charpai and small coffee table awaited him. A few minutes later Mian Jee arrived with two cups—neither put sugar in their chai.

"So how are things? How's family?"

"They're fine—listen, Mian Jee, we need to talk and it is actually quite important."

Mian Jee looked up from his chai. "I thought you said everything was alright?"

"Oh, it is, it is alright, at least as far as I'm concerned. But we need to talk about something else."

Ali was direct. "This Mirzai business you're getting involved in. This…isn't right."

Mian Jee didn't respond.

Ali continued. "Word has gotten out, everyone knows what you're involved in. I know you're on this spiritual campaign but enough already. It's been several years now. You need to just stop these wild goose chases after an apostate people, and just be a normal Muslim. What you're doing is wrong."

Mian Jee didn't respond.

"Listen, I know Islam, and I can tell you with certainty that these Mirzais aren't Muslim. You need to think of your family—because this is tearing them apart. Do what is right. You don't need to put your family through this. Think of your children. Do you really want to raise them in a home where the parents follow two different religions—one Islam and the other…God knows what?"

Mian Jee listened patiently. His chai was getting cold. Ali continued.

"Just let this nonsense go and don't do something you'll regret later."

Mian Jee reflected. Ali had never given him bad advice before. Finally, he turned and spoke.

"Ali, you've never given me bad advice before. You're always sober-minded, objective, even in difficult, complex situations."

Now it was Ali's turn to listen.

"So here's what I need. I trust you and am inclined to accept your advice. And I will accept it if…if I can only resolve a few dogma conflicts in Orthodox Islam that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad brings up."

Ali was pleasantly surprised. He expected a fight from his stubborn friend.

"Wait, that's it? I answer a few questions and that'll be the end of this nonsense?"

"Yes. Wait here."

Mian Jee went downstairs and into his room, where he kept his library. He grabbed his Qur'an and turned to go back upstairs. He

stopped and smiled at his wife and mother, and then continued back to the roof. Mian Jee handed Ali the Qur'an and pointed to the verses in question. "Read these verses. If you can just help me reconcile this, then I'm ready to be done with this and move on with my life."

Ali took the Qur'an.

"No problem, I need to get going but give me a few days and we'll sort out all of this. In the meantime, don't do anything stupid like becoming Mirzai."

Mian Jee nodded. "I'll wait for your guidance."

Ali got up to leave but paused. "Mian Jee, I am worried for your safety. You know I'll be your friend no matter what—but not everyone in this country is so open to different beliefs. I've heard of Mirzais being boycotted, beaten, and even killed."

Mian Jee calmly responded, "I should be so fortunate to have beliefs worth dying for."

Ali shook his head in dismay, embraced him and took leave. Mian Jee walked him to the front door and then saw him down the street. Ali left in good spirits, promising to return soon.

I wanted to hear more. "Uncle, this is great, but you haven't yet answered my question. In fact, it appears Ali had the same question I do: Why this useless hardship?"

It was getting late. Traveling by foot late at night through some of those alleyways wasn't exactly the world's smartest move. The answer would have to wait until tomorrow.

Bidding my uncle well, I left his house, walked down the alley and down the side street. Children were writing on the walls with colored chalk. The entire community was gated. In Pakistan, every house, every community is gated for safety. Typically, people add a layer of cement at the top of their walls, and before it dries, embed shards of glass—a homemade barbed wire.

I walked out onto the main street. Rabwah after dark is exciting. Shops are still open and the aroma of fresh fried delectables command the air. I walked past Tahir Heart Institute, a state-of-the-art cardiac center that provides free or near-free medical care to all Pakistanis, regardless of background. Pausing to admire it I heard a voice call out to me to stop walking any further.

Thinking perhaps it was Uncle Bashir, I turned with a short-lived smile. Jogging up to me instead was a Pakistani police officer ready to draw his pistol.

4

The Wrong Kind of Muslim

"*Swords can win territories, but not hearts. Force can bend heads, but not minds.*" — Mirza Tahir Ahmad

The police officer's left hand was up, making the "stop" motion, the other securely on his holster. He was slender and tall; easily around 6 feet 3 inches, and in full uniform. I want to say that his giant mustache added to his intimidation factor, but it's more likely that I was paranoid about how tightly he gripped his pistol.

I wasn't sure how to react, but stood still for the moment to let him know I wasn't going anywhere. It isn't necessarily smart to run from a man clutching a gun.

"What are you doing here?" He demanded to know.

"Why did you stop me?" I replied rather glibly.

"I asked what you're doing here." He demanded again, taking a step towards me.

"I'm walking." My reply was ruder than I'd intended. But nothing could've prepared me for his response.

"I know what you're doing here. Where's the bomb? Where'd you put it?!"

"Wha.. What?? Bomb? What the hell are you talking about?"

"Don't get smart with me, you son of a bitch. You goddamn Americans! Where's the bomb? Where is it, you terrorist?!"

The police officer took another step closer, one hand still in front and the other tightly clutching his pistol. It occurred to me that there was nervousness in his voice. At first, it surprised me that he knew I was American. But I quickly realized how foreign I looked from the way I dressed, the way I walked, the way I combed my hair even. When he heard me speak in my accented Urdu, it confirmed that I was definitely

either American or Canadian. He probably just guessed American, and guessed right.

My secret identity revealed, I decided to switch it up to English, having no idea whether he understood English or not. I figured it couldn't possibly get me in any more trouble.

"Alright, pal, listen. Slow down. You have no idea what you're doing, and you need to take your hand off your gun." My American humility showed through clearly. He became tenser. I countered by putting my palms out to show I had nothing to hide. "There's no bomb, I'm not a danger to you, and I'm only heading home." I found myself echoing a statement I'd made to police in post-9/11 America on more than one occasion.

"You not terrorist? Prove!" he said in his broken English as he pulled his gun partially out of its holster.

"Wait, what? I said slow down! Prove I'm not a terrorist?" How the hell was I supposed to do that? I paused because I couldn't believe the question. I had to deal with proving I wasn't a terrorist every time I flew in America since 2001. Every time I crossed the U.S.-Canada border I was "randomly stopped" to be searched, sometimes for hours. And traveling with my U.S. Marine brother wasn't any better. Once while crossing through Cornwall in Ontario, Border Patrol actually separated us and interrogated us about one another for four hours.

I'd been pulled off planes, interrogated in back rooms with a "mirror" on one wall, and frisked up and down. I'd had all my books and home videos copiously examined by airport security. I'd been pulled over dozens of times and let off with a warning while never actually told why I was pulled over in the first place. I'd dealt with the stares and the uneasy fellow travelers. I'd been randomly selected for a search so many times that the customs agents at O'Hare Airport actually recognized me by face, and I them.

Now, back in Pakistan, the land of my birth, the land of my ancestors, as I came to reconnect with my roots, I had to deal with...the exact same damn thing? What the hell was this world coming to? I was furious inside. Unfortunately for me, the cop didn't care.

"Look, this is ridiculous, how the hell do I prove to you I'm not a terrorist?"

He responded by gripping his gun tighter. He was getting impatient.

"Look, if I was a terrorist I would've..." I was about to argue that I would've looked like one, but the argument immediately failed in my mind. Let's face it; I was in my early twenties, brown, bearded (I had let it

grow out for a few weeks), not from the area, and walking alone in the dark. For someone looking to stereotype, particularly under the veil of anti-American prejudice, it didn't take much to convince him or her that they'd uncovered a CIA agent looking to cause trouble. Such conspiracy theories run rampant in Pakistan. To be fair, they're not all conspiracies, but that wasn't helping my case right now.

He wasn't budging from where he stood. Neither was his hand from where it rested. He watched me, obviously nervous, waiting for some magical proof of my non-terrorism. Proof I didn't have. Meanwhile, despite somewhat freaking out, I was amazed. I was amazed that he equated terrorism with being American. I was a terrorist not because I was Pakistani, but because I was an American, a "goddamn American" at that.

It felt like the twilight zone. Americans? Terrorists? No, no, but we were the victims of terrorism. We were the good guys. That's what 9/11 was all about, right? The whole world knew this. I saw Ground Zero with my own eyes after the towers fell. It was absolute carnage. I wept with my fellow Americans. Terrorists did that to us Americans. We did nothing wrong, right? And all this was even before we discovered that Osama bin Laden was hiding just a few hundred miles from where the police officer and I stood that day, in Pakistan, protected by you people, you Pakistani people. How dare you call us Americans terrorists?

Notwithstanding that America's foreign policy hasn't exactly been kosher, none of that would've mattered to the officer at that point. He remained silent, but stared me down, waiting; for what, I wasn't sure. But, I was sure it was something I didn't have.

And suddenly, it hit me. A light bulb literally turned on. The proof I needed to show that I wasn't a terrorist. Just as soon as the idea entered my mind, however, the fear of exposing it forced me to reconsider. Dare I show my evidence? Proof would require breaking a cardinal rule, one that my family had warned me not to break.

Even before I left for Pakistan, everyone repeatedly—particularly my parents—sat me down and warned me, "Listen, Qasim, you've got a big mouth, understand?"

"Umm, okay… Thanks?"

"But when you get to Pakistan, under no circumstance, for any reason, to any person, particularly to the government, do you ever break this rule. No matter what happens, you absolutely, positively, do not—"

"Should I be writing this down?"

"Just listen! Under no circumstance are you to reveal to someone, anyone, that you don't know personally, that—"

"This sounds important. I should probably write this down."

"Don't tell them that you are an Ahmadi Muslim! That's the single rule! Do not tell them you are an Ahmadi. Just ignore it and move on. Police tortured your cousin to near death, your other cousin was lynched, and too many things can go wrong. Too many are being killed. The last thing we need is you getting arrested or killed because you can't keep your big mouth shut. Do you understand?"

"Actually, I can probably remember that. Don't think I need to write it down."

"Qasim, I'm being serious."

"Yeah, sure sure, no problem, got it."

"NO, do you understand? You do not mention you're an Ahmadi! Under no
circumstance! Zero. This is not a light matter, Qasim."

"Yeah yeah, got it got it, I won't mention it. Moutho sealo."

Well, I guess I've never been particularly good at following orders. Middle children, psychologists say, tend to be more rebellious than the eldest or youngest because they supposedly get less attention. I am a middle child. And not that I'm bitter at my jerk siblings for hogging all the attention, but what I did next was probably the exact recklessness I was told to avoid.

"Officer, I'm not a terrorist, and the proof is that I'm an Ahmadi."

I blurted it out flatly, without emotion. I paused, envisioning Hollywoodesque furies of anger erupting from the officer. I might've flinched a little.

Instead, it seemed to catch him completely off guard. "You're…a Qadiani? An American Qadiani?"

"Erm, yes, an American Ahmadi. "So you *know* I'm not a terrorist."

I had a point. Despite the persecution, Ahmadis have never once instigated, retaliated, advocated, or endorsed any form of terrorism. Despite his obvious prejudice against "Qadianis," he knew this. The officer remained stoic, pondering over his next move. As was my big mouth habit, I kept talking.

"I'm visiting from America, but I was born here. I'm an Ahmadi; I'm just here to visit family. I assure you I have no bomb. I actually have difficulty getting my cell phone battery out of its case. I couldn't possibly put together a whole bomb."

He gave me a confused look. I guess my goddamn American humor must have been lost on him. Whatever the case, he gave me one

more hard stare, and slowly took a step…backwards. Then another, then another. He put his gun back in its holster and without saying another word, turned around and walked back the other way.

I did a little happy dance in my head, and breathed a huge sigh of relief. My heart was beating like mad. I'm not entirely sure I then understood the danger I put myself in. Instead, I was more in shock that I was called a terrorist in my birth country. Slowly I turned and started walking, lost in my thoughts. Despite everything, and though I didn't actually use the word "Muslim" to describe my faith in Pakistan, I walked with a swagger knowing that I mentioned my faith to a cop and "lived to tell about it."

One thing I never could figure out though. Why was this cop so interested in preventing what he thought was impending terrorism? I'd soon discover how absent the police were when terrorism struck—yet this guy was frighteningly zealous. It didn't add up.

My mind wandered back to the Mong massacre victims. Whereas I spoke to a police officer about my faith to *avoid* more trouble, for them, admitting their faith *invited* more trouble. I wondered if I would have the same courage should an actual terrorist point a gun at my head and demand to know my faith.

I honestly did not know the answer, but as I caught a rickshaw home, I thought I might find out from Mian Jee's story.

The Birth of "Islamic" Terrorism

The next day I headed over to my uncle's place to finish our discussion. The rickshaw zipped through the busy bazaar. I am fascinated with how rickshaw drivers can squeeze in and out of oncoming traffic without dying. They'd make Chicago taxi drivers green with envy. Finally, the gate I walked out of yesterday appeared and the rickshaw stopped. I paid the driver and headed over the final few hundred meters on my own.

As I entered the gate to my uncle's home, I saw Uncle Bashir taking a nap on a charpai outside in the shade. His home had an orange tree, and some oranges were just beginning to ripen. Hearing the clank of the heavy metal door, he creaked open one eye in time to see me looking at a few unpicked oranges, pretending to know what I was doing.

"Do you have any idea what you're doing?"

"Nope."

He pointed out a ripe orange that oddly didn't look ripe but, again, what'd I know? I plucked it and started peeling. Contemplating

whether to tell him about last nights escapades, I decided against it. Instead, I jumped back into last night's discussion.

"So Imam Ali promised to get back to him, what happened next? Did he get his questions answered?"

"Well, I'll get to that but there was another issue at hand. Around the same time Mian Jee began his personal search for an identity, millions of Indian Muslims began their own search for a national identity. Muslims were the minority in Hindu-dominated India. Mian Jee sought a re-interpretation of faith, and Indian Muslims sought a re-interpretation of their national identity."

"Okay, so he was trying to figure out his religious and political loyalties. Makes sense so far."

"Right, and on the political side, there was a movement that wanted a separate nation, apart from India. Mian Jee supported this movement. It just made sense to support a movement to create a nation where Muslims—or anyone of any faith for that matter—would not be oppressed for their faith. That nation was supposed to be Pakistan. A seasoned lawyer, Muhammad Ali Jinnah was Pakistan's leading champion—kind of like your American General Washington. He was the hero to ensure that Pakistan became a nation that championed religious freedom. A Shia Muslim himself, Jinnah recognized the possibility of minority discrimination. And he spoke relentlessly of equality and religious freedom. That message resonated with Mian Jee."

"So all this is going on, while Mian Jee is waiting for Imam Ali to get back to him."

"Well, it was going on well before Imam Ali got involved, and well after. But a few weeks went by, then a month, then several months—Ali did not bring up the verses in question. Mian Jee didn't ask."

"Why not ask?"

"Why rush it? Meanwhile, Mian Jee read reports of Ahmadi Muslims facing further boycotts, persecution, and the occasional murder—all for their faith. Some were being evicted from homes, others fired from jobs, and still others forced to divorce their spouses after deciding to join the Ahmadi Community. To be sure, it was never the community that forced them to divorce their spouses. On the contrary, the community urged them to work extra hard to preserve the marriages. Instead, usually a local mullah would demand a divorce or threaten the non-Ahmadi-Muslim in the marriage with eternal damnation, violence, boycott, or all three. As a married man himself, Mian Jee was not blind to how these incidents might affect his family."

"You know, Uncle, you're telling me all this but I'm still not understanding why he put himself through all this struggle. He's making all these sacrifices of his livelihood and family? Why risk throwing it all away?"

"These were the sacrifices he was making for the simple right to believe what his heart and mind were inclined to believe. You see, before Pakistan's independence, and even in the early years after Pakistan's formation, anti-Ahmadi-Muslim sentiments were scattered. It was the exception. But that all changed after Pakistan was formed."

My mind flashed to my study of American history. After mass Catholic immigration, the anti-Catholic sentiment in America rapidly grew. Likewise, the anti-black sentiment eventually "inspired" the KKK's formation. The anti-Mormon sentiment grew quickly as Mormons gained converts and momentum. It seemed like this bigotry was not a religious phenomenon, but a human ignorance phenomenon.

Uncle Bashir continued. "Ahmadi Muslims were seen as a nuisance, but certainly not a threat to the establishment. As such, the government largely ignored them. Mullahs would attack certain individuals who became influential in their preaching, but major attacks were a thing beyond comprehension, at least so far."

"But these attacks that *were* happening, who was inspiring them?"

"Ah, good question. Several clerics. But one particularly vicious mullah named Maududi worked extremely hard to change the passive discrimination and isolated persecution against Ahmadi Muslims into a full-scale war."

Later, I looked up this Maududi character. To put him in perspective, you might call him Pakistan's David Duke. Duke, for those who don't know, is the former head of the KKK, a "Christian" terrorist organization that yet claims to want peace...merely at the destruction of non-white heritages. As Duke is the face of modern-day "Christian" racism, Maududi is the face of modern-day "Islamic" terrorism. Mullah Maududi was also one of the leading opponents to Pakistan's pluralistic platform—in fact, he was aggressively opposed to Pakistan's creation itself. "Pakistan" literally means "land of the pure." Maududi retorted, "The establishment and birth of Pakistan is equivalent to the birth of a beast [...] Pakistan is a fool's paradise and an infidel state of Muslims."[6]

Uncle Bashir continued. "Maududi soon founded the Jamaat-e-Islami party, a pseudo-religious political organization. Many rightfully call it a terrorist organization because of their crimes against humanity—particularly in Bangladesh. And thus, the real birth of 'Islamic' terrorism."

"What about the Taliban, Al Qaeda, all these groups?"

"All Maududi's offspring. The Taliban, as we know it today, received their ideologies from none other than Maududi's twisted preaching. His Jamaat-e-Islami group has been convicted of mass genocide, rape, and the most vicious violence against religious minorities anyone could imagine."

Maududi's influence is remarkable, really. He had no actual formal training on Islamic shariah law. Virtually all of his analysis on important issues, such as the rights of minorities, the "consequences" for apostasy or for blasphemers, or the separation of mosque and state, are wholly baseless in their relation to Islam; his views are repulsively inaccurate at best and horrifyingly disgusting otherwise. While Maududi was certainly not the only cleric to spread such intolerance and to advocate for such violence, he was a leading champion of hate. His Jamaat-e-Islami organization and its leaders have been convicted of raping and ordering rapes of Bengali women, killing Bengali civilians, and causing extensive damage to homes and property. They've committed similar atrocities in Pakistan.

"I still don't understand how Maududi made his ideas popular. He's repulsive."

"Maududi was eloquent and persuasive. To his followers, he was their knight in shining armor ready to 'fight the machine' of western secularism. Part of what made Mian Jee's journey so difficult was having to constantly research the misinformation and propaganda about Islam Ahmadiyya that Maududi and his ilk espoused. Mirzais evidently prayed to a different god, read a different Qur'an, drank alcohol, ate swine, encouraged adultery, used drugs, and engaged in any number of ridiculous nonsense that a corrupt mind could concoct."

I thought back to my friend Alex Navarro from Chicago, who—when studying Islam in late 1999/early 2000—was constantly bombarded with misinformation, from his own minister no less. But the remarkable thing about such misinformation tactics is that they ultimately backfire on those employing them. When Alex saw his minister's lack of candidness in answering his questions about Islam and Christianity—it only drew him further away from Christianity and closer to, well, not Islam necessarily, but closer to the decision to search for the thing that answered his questions. It is human nature to fight censorship and seek out information that is deliberately withheld. The difference, however, is that Alex's experiences were in a nation that protected freedom of thought, while Mian Jee experienced it during a time and place where religious freedom was the exception, not the rule.

My uncle went inside for a moment and came back holding two worn-out books. Handing one to me he said, "This is something Maududi wrote around that time."

"Why do you have it?"

"Because I am not naïve enough to believe something about someone without studying it myself first. I wanted to see what Maududi had to say from his own mouth."

"Point taken."

"But there's another reason."

"Which is?"

"In the coming years, Mian Jee would seek out leading clerics personally. Two of these leading clerics were Maulvi Sanaullah of Amritser and none other than Mullah Maududi."

I raised my eyebrows. "Wow, what happened?"

"Mian Jee actually met with Maulvi Sanaullah for in depth discussions on Islam."

"I don't understand... Why? If both were apparently Muslim, which points of view did Mian Jee defend?"

"Mian Jee defended Ahmadiyya Islam and mind you, this was before he joined the Ahmadi Community."

"But if he was so convinced, then why didn't he just join the community then?"

"Well, isn't it obvious? Because he wasn't yet convinced. He was doing his due diligence. This was just another form of research."

I nodded in understanding, reflecting over Aristotle's wisdom, "It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."[7]

"Then what of Maududi?"

"Mian Jee wrote to him often to ask him questions. True Maududi was vulgar, but again, Mian Jee wanted to hear answers from Maududi himself. It would've been easy to dismiss him based on what others said, but that wasn't what Mian Jee signed up for. "

"But I'm sure Maududi only deterred him from studying Islam Ahmadiyya, no?"

"Sure, but so what? Mian Jee wasn't looking to fulfill a preconceived belief. He forced himself to keep an open mind—especially when it became difficult and pushed him out of his comfort zone. That's when it matters most, you know?"

There was that blasted comfort zone again. Uncle Bashir continued.

"But, Maududi's extremist views forced Mian Jee to study and research that much harder. Maududi's hatred for Ahmadi Muslims stemmed from two facts that Maududi apparently found repulsive. First, Ahmadi Muslims firmly rejected (and reject) violence as a means to spread Islam. Maududi instead defined Islam's purpose as to destroy all non-Islamic regimes. Here, look at this."

Uncle Bashir flipped open to a page he had previously marked and asked me to read it. As it was in Urdu and my Urdu-reading then was mediocre at best, I turned it around and handed it right back with a sheepish grin.

Shaking his head and muttering something about how much more learned kids were back in his day, Uncle Bashir read aloud,

> Islam wishes to destroy all states and governments anywhere on the face of the earth which are opposed to the ideology and program of Islam regardless of the country or the Nation which rules it... Islam requires the earth—not just a portion, but the whole planet ... because the entire mankind should benefit from the ideology and welfare program [of Islam]... Towards this end, Islam wishes to press into service all forces which can bring about a revolution and a composite term for the use of all these forces is "Jihad." ... the objective of the Islamic "Jihad" is to eliminate the rule of an un-Islamic system and establish in its stead an Islamic system of state rule.[8]

"Now, this is what Mian Jee was looking at when he read Maududi's work. This line of reasoning appealed to the nationalistic and political Muslims. None of this appealed to Mian Jee though."

"So what appealed to him?"

"This."

Uncle Bashir read another quote from the second book still in his hand.

> A religion, which does not inculcate universal compassion, is no religion at all. Similarly, a human being without the faculty of compassion is no human at all. Our God has never discriminated between one people and another... The earth created by God provides a common floor for all people alike, and His sun and moon and many stars are a source of radiance and provide many other benefits to all alike...These attributes of God teach us the lesson that we, too, should behave magnanimously and kindly towards our fellow human beings and should not be petty of heart and illiberal.[9]

"Powerful. Who wrote that?"

"That, my dear nephew, was Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. He wrote this fifty years prior to Maududi's writings."

"And this is what Maududi found intolerable?"

"Yep."

"But that doesn't make any sense. No right-minded person today would choose violence over compassion."

"You forget. You're speaking with the benefit of hindsight, which makes things much easier. And you've got the Internet, any book you want, and it's all at your fingertips. You know how to read! And all you have to worry about is yourself and no one else. But in 1930s and '40s India, in a land without modern information and communication, and no real police power to protect against violence, and where illiteracy abounded—decisions can be much harder to make."

Maududi was what you would call a rock-star cleric—he had the celebrity following of Billy Graham and the evil-mindedness of Fred Phelps of the Westboro Baptist Church. Philip Jenkins, one of America's foremost religion and history scholars, explains that Maududian teachings directly and heavily influenced Qutb, the founder of the terrorist organization known as the Muslim Brotherhood.[10] And while Maududi's teachings have resulted in churches and mosques in Pakistan being bombed, the KKK's and other extremists' teachings have resulted in churches in America being bombed (and yes, along with mosques too).

Few remember that even into the 1920s, the KKK represented four million Americans, or one out of every fifteen white Americans. No fair-minded person asks Christianity or Christians to answer for the KKK's bigotry. Even today, America boasts no shortage of Christian evangelists who have openly called for the destruction of non-Christians—or those not "Christian" enough.

Fred Phelps of the Westboro Baptist Church teaches that every American soldier killed is a sign of God's wrath on our nation. Likewise, in his numerous books against Islam, mega church leader Rod Parsley declares, "I do not believe that our country can truly fulfill its divine purpose until we understand America was founded, in part, with the intention of seeing this false religion [Islam] destroyed."[11] Senator John McCain called Parsley his spiritual advisor and a "great American leader," yet Parsley's statements are somehow ignored as calls to violence. Pat Robertson has called Muslims "worse than Nazis,"[12] while Franklin Graham calls Islam an "evil and wicked religion."[13] Former presidential candidate Rick Santorum called for the eradication of Muslims, "What

must we do to win [against Islam]? We must educate, engage, evangelize, and eradicate."[14]

I offer American examples only to demonstrate that extremism has no religion. People wonder how Maududi gained such influence if what he taught was so alien to Islam. The same question is applicable to Phelps, Parsley, or Robertson's influence despite their discriminatory stances that are so alien to Christ. Maududi was nothing more than a lunatic—influential on some levels, yes; authoritative, hardly. But I digress.

My uncle continued. "So in short, Maududi was the man behind the anti-Ahmadi-Muslim movement and the anti-pluralism movement in then India, soon to be Pakistan. Mian Jee, on the other hand, very much appreciated the Ahmadiyya interpretation of Islam because it was founded in pluralism. It became clear to him that a clash was coming—of ideas and forces—and that he could do nothing to avoid it."

"I'm still waiting to hear about when Imam Ali came back to Mian Jee to answer his question."

"So meanwhile, several months passed and Mian Jee hadn't yet heard from his friend. He began to worry. Perhaps Ali was so disgusted that he did not care to discuss the topic again. All Mian Jee could do was wait and reflect, read and pray, and hope for the best."

"Again, why not simply ask Imam Ali why he was delaying?"

"Well, Mian Jee didn't have to wait too much longer as late one evening, a sudden knock rattled the silence."

5

The War Within

"*What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us.*" — Ralph Waldo Emerson

Mian Jee stumbled out of bed and made his way to answer the door. The moon shone brightly, lighting the way to his front gate. It was a cool fall evening. The stars were out that night.

"Who is it?"

"It's Ali. Can I come in?"

Mian Jee's heart leapt. He opened the door immediately. And sure enough, there stood Ali. He seemed exhausted. Mian Jee reached out and pulled Ali inside.

At first, both were silent. It was an awkward silence of sorts. Finally, Mian Jee spoke.

"Chai?"

Ali smiled. "Yes, that would be wonderful."

As usual, Ali made his way to the roof and Mian Jee tended to the chai. A minute later he joined Ali on the roof, and found him lying comfortably on the charpai. Ali sat up as Mian Jee handed him his chai. No sugar of course.

"So Ali," as Mian Jee sat down, "to what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?"

Both knew full well why Ali was there. Or at least Ali knew. Mian Jee could only speculate. Ali reached into his briefcase and pulled out a Qur'an—the same Qur'an Mian Jee handed him what seemed like an eternity ago.

Mian Jee slowly and carefully took the Qur'an from him. He inspected it carefully. It was no longer a crisp copy. It was now folded, creased, and worn down. Sentences were underlined, pages were

highlighted, and notes were scribbled in the margins. The pages were torn at the edges. Furious scribbled writing surrounded the verses in question.

"You want to talk about this?"

Ali nodded slowly as he sipped his chai. He stared aimlessly at the horizon. Mian Jee looked at him directly, and then back at the Qur'an, and then back at Ali, waiting for a response. Both sat in silence, again.

Finally, Ali spoke.

"I read the verses."

Mian Jee chuckled. "Yeah, I noticed."

"And then I read them again…and again after that."

"Well…good!"

"And then I read them again, and this time I made notes. And I highlighted some of the words."

"Yes, I saw that too and—"

"And then, and then I put the Qur'an down and left it alone for…a long time."

"Well, why would you do th—"

"And I went to people more scholarly than I, and I asked them the questions raised by those verses. When I asked them those questions, you know what they said to me?"

"What did they—"

"I'll tell you what they said. They said I'm a *kafir* [infidel]. They said I'm a Mirzai for even asking those questions. They told me I would burn in hell for questioning my faith."

Mian Jee remained quiet this time.

"So I pressed them. I demanded they answer my questions, your questions. I couldn't accept 'just trust us' as the answer. I needed a real answer. Why should I believe them just because they said so? When they saw I wouldn't stop they told me to leave and not return until I removed the Mirzai cancer from my mind. So I did the only thing I could. I got up and left."

Mian Jee, surprised to see such an impassioned plea, implored, "Ali, you didn't have to do all that. It wasn't necessary."

Ali didn't reply but stared off at the horizon. Finally, he turned to Mian Jee and looked at him straight in the eye. "Mian, I joined the Ahmadiyya Community."

Ali's tone was dead serious. Both men remained silent for several moments. Ali continued, "And more importantly, you can't delay any longer. This is truth."

"Well, that's what I'm trying to find out."

"But there's nothing left to debate! There's nothing to—"

This time Mian Jee interrupted Ali.

"Stop. Just, stop. I must explain something to you."

Mian Jee stood up and paced about the roof. "I am pleased that you found your peace. I really am happy for you. But it means little to me."

He paused as he came to a stop near the edge of the roof. Ali listened attentively.

"I cannot stress this enough." Mian Jee sighed. "I did not stop researching Islam Ahmadiyya because you told me to stop. And I refuse to now accept it simply because you did. That's just not the way this works. This is *my* decision. You can't take that from me. This is my journey, my path, and I'm doing it my way."

Ali sat silent.

Mian Jee continued. "I let you walk your path. The least you can do is let me walk mine."

Ali sat still, wondering if he should continue his protest. Mian Jee paced about the roof.

Another moment passed and Ali abruptly stood up. "I think my work here is done then."

"You're leaving?"

"I've said what I've needed to. I trust you know what to do from here."

With that, Ali said his goodbyes and left as quickly as he'd come.

It took a moment but I quickly realized, whatever the verses, it didn't matter. What mattered was that these men made a decision of their own accord, of their own free will. They didn't force themselves on anyone and no one forced anything on them. They were free men and made free choices with a free conscience.

By now, it was about 1938. Mian Jee was in the prime of his manhood. His health was strong, his mind was fit, but his soul still craved contentment. His wife and mother had all but given up on trying to convince him to stop his research of different faiths and philosophies. The next decade transformed Mian Jee from a modest principal to a recognized religion scholar. If a book existed on religion, he sought it out and read it cover to cover. He studied the Qur'an, the Bible, the Torah, and the Vedas with passion and zeal. His debts diminished as quickly as his knowledge grew.

During this decade Mian Jee also became extremely strict in his prayers. He made it his daily habit to rise several hours before sunrise for supererogatory prayer known as *Tahujjad* prayer.

It became his obsession.

Familial tensions, however, grew. Mian Jee's wife was becoming increasingly displeased with his studying. His mother was even more antagonistic. They had five children now, two sons and three daughters. Strangely, concern about how to raise them methodically diminished from Mian Jee's mind. He came to terms with the decision that just as he took his time deciding his faith, he would instill the same principles in his children—encouraging them to find their own path without compulsion or coercion.

One evening, without warning, tragedy struck. Their youngest daughter, three years old, suddenly died. Mian Jee wept—trying to remain steadfast in his trust in God. Beiji was visibly pained for months after.

For those looking for an excuse, this was a sign from God. It was Mian Jee's punishment for being on the wrong path. Undeterred though, he ignored the criticism and continued his research.

For any parent to lose one child is beyond what most can bear. For Mian Jee and Beiji, however, the difficulties were just beginning. A year later, they were blessed with another child—and three years later she too passed, suddenly and unexpectedly. Two years later after that they were blessed with yet another child, and another year after, she too returned to her Maker.

Now nearly fifteen years had passed since Mian Jee laid on what he thought was his deathbed. Nearly fifteen years since he made his promise to God to find Him. Relations with his wife and mother remained tepid at best. Meanwhile, the external struggle of whether Pakistan would or would not become its own nation raged on.

After fifteen long years Mian Jee awoke one morning with a sense of peace in his heart. He couldn't describe it to anyone (not that he needed to). It would be like asking someone to prove they love their spouse. Mian Jee had found his peace. He sat down to write a letter that was fifteen years in the making.

Mian Jee sealed the letter in an envelope, included five rupees (as was his habit whenever he wrote to the *Khalifa*), and sent it posthaste to Qadian, where the Khalifa then resided. (As a side, the Khalifa is the title in Islam given to the spiritual head of the Muslims. The Khalifa's role is somewhat similar to that of the pope for Catholics.) The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is united under one Khalifa. In 1947, Mian Jee wrote to him to join the community.

Around the same time and after years of relentless work, Pakistan was born on August 14, 1947. Despite the efforts Mullah Maududi and other extremists like him, who sought to ensure Pakistan would never become its own country, the dream of millions of Indian Muslims came

true. They would now have their own nation conceived on "the fundamental principles that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state," as Jinnah (Pakistan's founder) put it.[15] In an address to the United States less than a year after Pakistan's birth, Jinnah re-affirmed Pakistan's commitment to freedom and pluralism, specifically saying that Pakistan would not be a theocracy, but would champion secular government and religious freedom.[16]

Much to the dismay of everyone involved, Maududi raised his flag of intolerance immediately after Pakistan's birth. Soon, Ahmadi Muslims began facing vigilante justice, only for their faith. It began as discrimination—albeit aggressive discrimination. Ahmadi Muslims faced large-scale boycotts of their businesses while extremists continued to issue threats of violence to the newly formed Pakistani government. That is, unless the government complied and declared Ahmadi Muslims to be an apostate minority. Ahmadi Muslims were pivotal in Pakistan's creation—actively supporting Jinnah and his political party. In fact, a famous Ahmadi named Muhammad Zafrullah Khan drafted the Pakistan Resolution.[17] Now, Ahmadis were the first to face vicious discrimination from the majority. The nation was but born, and Ahmadi Muslims were already the wrong kinds of Muslims.

For decades now, Mian Jee served valiantly as the principal of the local school. His reputation as an astounding educator preceded him. Now, as word got out that he had converted to "Qadianism," things changed. Mian Jee was the only Ahmadi Muslim in his village. His neighbor, Abdul Rahman, along with some mullahs from neighboring villages, increased their efforts to abuse his reputation.

A decade prior, when Mian Jee was still a young man of thirty, he was respected throughout his village as a righteous, honest, trustworthy individual, with wisdom beyond his years. Now in 1948, but a year after Pakistan had formed, he was the odd man out.

But Mian Jee marched forward. His inspirations were the early Muslims, who faced a decade of brutal persecution in Mecca before finally escaping with nothing more than the clothes on their back. Rather than fight, they peacefully fled to Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia) and Medina, where they forged alliances with Christians and Jews, respectively. Mian Jee found inspiration in Prophet Moses who, despite facing a mighty Pharaoh and fierce army, stood firm in his trust in God and demanded to let his people go. He found inspiration in Prophet Noah, who rose above the mockery to remain strong and steadfast.

I reflected on Mong. Were some principles worth dying for? Was freedom of conscience one such principle? I questioned this as a single guy without anyone else depending on me. Mian Jee was in a different boat—one that I could not clearly relate to at the time.

A thought suddenly crossed my mind and I interrupted my uncle. "Wait, let's step back for a minute. Explain to me how you got to know all this. When did you meet Mian Jee?"

He just smiled and continued. A few years later, on a warm summer night in June 1950, he heard an infant child cry out in the darkness. Mian Jee and Beiji were parents to a healthy baby boy. That child, Qasim, was your father. Your grandparents prayed for him intensely, especially after three children died in a row. When he was born healthy and happy, your grandmother Beiji joined the community as well.

The revelation caught me by total surprise. I sat silent, contemplating what I'd just heard. Finally, I managed to utter, "This Mian Jee...was Mian Sirajudeen? We've been talking about my grandfather this whole time?"

My uncle smiled ear to ear. "Yes, Son, this is your history! This is the story of the night your father was born. This is where you are from!"

I stood up and paced back and forth, as I am wont to do when in disbelief. I put my hands on my head and pulled back my hair.

I was inspired, yet ashamed and angry. How could I have missed out on all this? This man sacrificed so much only to think freely. Would I have acted the same way?

I wasn't sure.

Gathering myself, I continued, "So Mian Jee, erm, my grandfather. Once his wife joined the community things must've gotten better at home right? And now Pakistan was a nation, so things must've gotten better externally. But you said the hardest times were yet to come. How does that fit?"

"It doesn't add up, does it?"

I shook my head no.

"Let's get a bite to eat. Son, the fact is that the religious freedom you enjoy today in America is something your grandfather was willing to give his life for in Pakistan. Each day that passed was another day that Mullah Maududi and his hatred-based ideologies gained strength. Pakistan was born, yes. But it turned out that Pakistan's birth was not the solution for Muslims who felt discriminated against. Instead, Pakistan's birth would soon prove to be the cause. Mian Jee was about to find out what it really meant to have beliefs worth dying for.

Mian Jee was in danger...and this time he knew it.

6

Into the Darkness

"*Jesus says, 'Love your enemies.'...love has within it a redemptive power...that eventually transforms individuals. Just keep loving them, and they can't stand it too long.*" — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The next morning I woke up earlier than usual and headed out on my short trek to Uncle Bashir's place. It occurred to me that what began as a seemingly singular question, had now turned into a three-day episode—so far. As I closed the gate behind me, I could see my usual rickshaw guy in the distance, waiting to pick up his next fare. I motioned with my hand that I wanted to hire him and he headed my way.

I boarded the rickshaw and added, "Same place as yesterday."

"Where?"

"The quarters by Tahir Heart Institute." Thinking to myself sarcastically, "How dare he not remember my life and my life alone?"

"Okay, fifty rupees."

"What? Dude, it was thirty-five yesterday."

"Fine, forty rupees."

"No, I don't think you understand. I'm not negotiating today. Why can't we just agree on the same price as yesterday?"

"Yesterday isn't today. Forty rupees."

"Oh, well, that's just some stellar logic now isn't it, Sherlock?"

"What's Sherlock?"

"Never mind! Fine, forty, just go." I quietly added under my breath, "Thief." I'm pretty sure he heard me.

We pulled up to the usual gate. I jumped off and made it a point to tell him he was ripping me off. In reply, he sped off, nearly running over my foot.

"Hey, I know where you work, pal!" I yelled out after him.

I made the short stroll to my uncle's place. As I leaned in to knock on the front gate, the door unexpectedly opened back, and what looked like a bad Bollywood movie appeared before me. My uncle, seventy-four years young, wearing a vest, dark sunglasses, a cap, flip flops, and a big grin, leaned back on his motorcycle and revved the engine. I was speechless and couldn't help but laugh.

"What do you think, Qasim?"

"Uhhh, well, Uncle, I think you're a bit late on your midlife crisis."

"Ha, come on. Jump on and we'll go for a spin."

"Yeah, no. I'm gonna pass on this one but thanks for the invite." I tried to walk inside but he stopped me.

"No, come, I want to show you a place you'll find memorable."

"Uncle, riding that bike with you might be the last memory I ever have. I'm not getting on that thing."

"You're being unreasonable, Qasim. I ride this bike all the time."

"Actually feeling pretty reasonable from my vantage. But no need to worry, let's just take a rickshaw…I know a guy."

"I'm not paying those guys, I have my own bike, why should I pay them?"

I sighed. I knew where this was going. I hated to have to suggest it, but sitting on a motorcycle with a seventy-four-year-old Evil Knievel wasn't my idea of a good time.

I finally choked out, "Fine…let's…just walk then."

The way Uncle Bashir smiled told me he knew what he was doing. Regardless, I didn't want to risk it.

We headed out of the neighborhood and back onto the main street. "So where're we headed?"

"You'll see, it's not terribly far." Without pausing he added, "So shortly after your father was born, your great-grandmother died. Mian Jee was not only in a great deal of pain, but in a way, he'd lost protection from other family members."

"What do you mean by 'protection'?"

"Mian Jee wasn't an only child. Nor was Beiji. They had siblings. I had cousins."

"What do you mean had? Where are they now? Can I meet them?"

"No. You can't." A sad demeanor overtook him. "When Mian Jee made the choice he made, it truly was for himself, in more ways than you understand."

"I don't understand."

"I know. So a few years after Pakistan was formed, extremist mullahs began an all-out propaganda machine against Ahmadi Muslims. Pretty soon this propaganda turned to open threats, and those threats into riots. Dozens of Ahmadi Muslims were killed, hundreds more were injured, and countless Ahmadi shops, houses, and mosques were set ablaze. Large-scale boycotts of Ahmadi-owned businesses followed. And all the while, these extremists continued to threaten the government. They wanted the government to declare Ahmadi Muslims to be kafir or suffer the consequences of extremist violence."

"And while Mian Jee was in the midst of all this, did he fight back?"

"No, on the contrary, he refused. The Khalifa forbade violent responses. In the bigger cities back then people were more educated and dignified. Clerics didn't have the influence over people that they do now. But even back then, in the rural areas, it was a different story. We tried to convince him to get a gun to at least protect the homestead, but he refused."

We walked down the main street. It was a busy morning. Rabwah is more of a bicycle town than a car town. Probably 90 percent of transportation is done either by foot or on bicycle, or in my case, rickshaw. It isn't a terribly huge town and often, bicycles are the fastest way to get around. As a child in Pakistan, I was once run over by a bicycle, breaking my collarbone in the process. As we walked today, I was careful not to repeat history.

"Why was he so opposed to any form of self-defense? Seems unwise, no?"

"Actually, I take that back. Whenever we insisted he get something to protect himself and Beiji, he'd laugh it off and say there were plenty of cutting knives here and there in the kitchen. 'That's all I need,' he'd say. Really he just wanted us off his back."

"Well, I'm not sure how you say it in Urdu, but in English there's a saying where someone foolishly brings a knife to a gun fight. Seems like the case here."

"Not at all. If the goal was to kill the extremists, then perhaps. But the goal instead was to kill 'em with kindness. Why bother with force? I'm not sure how you say it in English, but in Urdu we have a saying: violence begets violence."

"We have that saying in English too Uncle."

"Yeah, I know. And don't you forget it. But anyway, a violent response wasn't necessary then just as it isn't now. But unlike now, during those early attempts to persecute Ahmadi Muslims, the Pakistani

government actually did their job and fought against the persecution as a matter of law and order. They reassured that every Pakistani citizen had perfect freedom of religion, and that interference with it wouldn't be tolerated. The government had dignity back then."

"Dignity? What about all the Ahmadis that were murdered in the riots?"

"True, those were horrific events, but it happened in spite of the government, not because of them. The government rejected extremist desires to have us labeled kafir. In fact, twice Mullah Maududi was sent to prison because of his violent teachings against us. And in 1953, because of the deaths Maududi's preaching caused, the government sentenced him to death."

"Maududi was executed?!"

"Nope."

"Okay, so, not that I'd wish it on anyone, but I guess the obvious question is: Why wasn't he executed?"

"No one really knows why, but people have their theories. Some say America bailed him out. Others say Saudi Arabia did. I don't know if any of that is true. But whatever the case, he was acquitted without any real explanation and that was that. He was free to continue his hate preaching. And it wasn't long before it finally hit home."

"Hit home?"

"Word got out that in your grandfather's village, Muradwal, someone had become a Mirzai."

"That's bad, right? That word got out?"

"Well, no, but it served to rally the Mullah base."

"What'd they do?"

"Their original plan was to threaten to kill any Mirzai they saw. They marched through Muradwal—your grandfather's village—first. Fortunately, the police warned them against any incitements to violence. Also fortunately, they listened. Instead, they chanted anti-Ahmadi slogans loudly, condemning Ahmadis to hell, and called them kafir and filthy."

"You were, what, twenty-one by now?"

"Yes, it was 1953 or thereabouts. And actually for me, this was an eye-opening moment. The mullahs behind this rally took some poor sap and tied him up. They painted his face black and made him ride an ass while facing the wrong way. They hung a sign around his neck that said... God forbid... 'This is the Mirzai Messiah, Ahmad.'"

Hearing this was mind-boggling. Not only because of the mullahs' complete disregard for basic civility and respect, but more so because of their incredible hypocrisy. Just a year before my trip to Pakistan, the

Muslim world—particularly in Pakistan—was in an uproar over the Danish cartoons that mocked Prophet Muhammad.[18] Dozens died in the rioting, many more were injured, and God only knows how many homes and businesses were destroyed. Yet, such individuals had no problem mocking the religious sentiments of those with whom they disagreed. And the reality is that even today, publicly mocking Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan is wholly embraced.

"The mob promised, at least, that they would not create violence. On that condition the police let them march through. They did not incite violence—only hatred and bigotry."

"But why was this such an eye-opening moment? I'm sure they insulted the Messiah Ahmad all the time."

"Sure they did. But I was not an Ahmadi at that time so it didn't affect me the same way."

"Wait, you weren't an Ahmadi then?"

"No, my father was, I wasn't. He didn't force anything on us but let us make our own choice."

"Excellent. I wish more parents did that."

"You wish more parents did what?"

"You know, taught their kids how to think instead of what to think."

"Well, on that day, when I saw Mian Jee, my father, bear those insults with patience, something clicked. I compared his reaction of patience with the uncontrolled bigotry and hatred the mullahs were spewing. At that junction it became a no-brainer. I wanted to be a Muslim who stood for peace, for self-control. On that day, I joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community."

"Ironic, that a campaign designed to promote hatred against Ahmadis actually had the exact opposite effect on you."

My uncle reached out and stopped me. A semi-truck blasted past us without slowing down the slightest bit. I would've stepped right in front of it.

"Look ahead when you're talking, Son. Cars and trucks don't slow down for anyone here."

We were at the end of Rabwah's main street, at a T-intersection. There were no traffic lights, no stop signs, no police officers directing traffic. Being street-smart suddenly had a whole new meaning.

"We have to cross here. Just wait for the traffic to die down. And yes, that does seem ironic that a hate event had the opposite effect on me. But I believe fair-minded people look for examples of honesty and integrity based on principle, not based on preconceived propaganda. The

biggest favor those mullahs did was present to me two examples of Islam, two lifestyle choices, side by side. Then, it was easy."

While my uncle explained his rationale, my attention was slowly drawn to the other side of the street. It was a large field of…I wasn't sure what just yet. A nine-foot wall surrounded it. Behind the field a modest red stone mountain towered over the city. The brown landscape, red mountain, bright blue sky, white clouds, and shining sun made for a picturesque scene.

"So where *are* we going?"

"We're almost there, you'll see."

"You know what you're describing with these anti-Ahmadi riots and, well, lynching of sorts, sounds a lot like the anti-black Christian riots and violence in the American south."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, the KKK, a white supremacist terrorist organization claiming to be 'Christian' bombed several black churches…because, well, the KKK are racist terrorists. And that was all around the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. But the government quashed it eventually. Don't get me wrong, we've got plenty of race issues in America, but for what it's worth, we're not exactly bombing each other's churches today. If it happens, it is the rare exception. I don't get why Pakistan today is still stuck in 1953?"

"Well, good question."

"But wait." I cut him off. "You didn't answer my question before. What did you mean about Mian Jee losing his 'family protection' after becoming Ahmadi?"

My uncle smiled. "You're about to find out."

We finished crossing the street and walked towards the gate. Once close enough to read the sign out front, written in Urdu, I turned to my uncle, "We're at a cemetery?"

"Not just a cemetery, *the* cemetery. Come on."

Uncle Bashir visited this cemetery almost daily. The armed guard recognized him and waved us through the front gate. "Why do we need an armed guard at a cemetery? Are they stealing corpses nowadays in Pakistan?" I said half-jokingly.

"Yes," Uncle Bashir replied, wholly seriously, and kept walking.

I later discovered just how serious he was. This was known as the "Heavenly Graveyard," established for Ahmadi Muslims who dedicated at least 10 percent of their income to charity. It was under constant threat, and had been attacked several times before. Extremists throughout Pakistan's history found ways to desecrate Ahmadi graves—simply because they were Ahmadi.

In less extreme cases, they'd write insults on the tombstone itself—kafir, filthy, infidel, hell-bound. Likewise, they might throw trash and feces on the grave.

In more extreme cases, extremists break tombstones in half, or rip it out of the ground altogether. This is a bigger problem in more remote locations where graves aren't visited regularly. But even when police are present, they often enough assist, rather than reprimand those engaging in the grotesque acts. On December 3, 2012, extremists destroyed over 120 tombstones in a Lahore cemetery belonging to the Ahmadiyya Community. As usual, police did nothing.[19]

In the most extreme cases, however, they would exhume the corpse or forbid its burial at all. A mullah would file a blasphemy claim or engage in vigilante justice against an Ahmadi buried in a "Muslim" graveyard. On account of the deceased being an Ahmadi Muslim, the corpse allegedly violated the graveyard's sanctity, and needed to be removed. Extremists have been known to dig up the corpse days after burial and expel it from the graveyard.

Thus, grave desecration, destruction, and exhumation are realities every Ahmadi family in Pakistan must consider when deciding where to bury their loved ones who have passed on.

Suddenly, the armed guard at the Heavenly Graveyard seemed inadequate. Meanwhile, I marveled at the graveyard. It truly was beautiful, pristine, and serene—befitting of the name "Heavenly." Well-kept trees lined the walkways. The tall walls blocked out blaring horns and traffic. And the majestic red mountain stood over, symbolically protecting the cemetery's residents.

We walked down the main pathway and veered right. A few more paces down, Uncle Bashir stopped and turned to me.

"You do know who Dr. Abdus Salam is, right?"

"Sure, he was an Ahmadi Muslim who won the Nobel Prize in Physics. He's buried here?"

"Of course, where else would he be buried? Also, he was the world's first Muslim scientist to win the Nobel, and the first Pakistani."

I got excited. Dr. Salam is a hero for many Ahmadi Muslim youth—myself no exception. Some of his family and several grandchildren today live in the United States. I was thrilled and grateful to visit his tomb and pay my respects.

"Where? Where's his tomb?"

"Right there."

My uncle pointed to the tombstone literally next to me. I turned eagerly to see Dr. Salam's tombstone—my hero's tombstone.

But, my joy was short-lived. My smile vanished. In an instant my enthusiasm transformed from excitement to confusion, then denial, then realization, and then anger. I never got to the acceptance stage. My mind couldn't accept what it saw. To this day it still hasn't.

There it was in bold letters:

PROFESSOR MUHAMMAD ABDUS SALAM
SON OF CHAUDHRY MUHAMMAD HUSSAIN AND HAJIRA HUSSAIN
29 JANUARY 1926 — 21 NOVEMBER 1996
IN 1979 BECAME THE FIRST NOBEL LAUREATE FOR HIS WORK IN PHYSICS

The word MUSLIM was wiped out. How was this possible? Dr. Salam was a national hero, an international icon. I tried to rationalize and could only conclude that extremists snuck in at night and defaced the tomb. But even that didn't make sense. If extremists had done this, then it would have been repaired by now. I turned to my uncle in disbelief.

"I don't understand. And why haven't we fixed it yet?"

"We can't fix it."

"The hell we can't, I'll fix it right now." I was angry and wasn't exactly sure what I would do to actually fix it. But it seemed like the thing to say at the time.

"Qasim, this is the way things are."

Pushing past the denial, what he said finally clicked in my mind. The horrifying reality.

"The government did this?"

Uncle Bashir nodded in affirmation.

"They desecrated a dead man's grave—a national hero's grave?"

My uncle didn't respond.

When you get a chance, look up Dr. Abdus Salam. Dr. Salam won his Nobel for predicting—over thirty years ago—the recently discovered God Particle. His contribution to science, to mankind, to world history, is of Copernican standards. This is the man who predicted the missing link that explains what gave the universe mass and how it is physically possible for us to exist. His work helped lay the foundation for the current revolution in physics that literally affects everything we know about the creation of the universe. Yet Pakistan ignores all this on account of Dr. Salam's faith as an Ahmadi Muslim.

But in hindsight, this should not have been a surprise. This was just the latest act of bigotry in a line of bigoted actions against one of Pakistan's—and the world's—greatest citizens. Late Prime Minister

Benazir Bhutto refused to meet with him on account of his faith. And in 2012, upon the God Particle's discovery, Pakistani media refused to air any coverage that risked giving Dr. Abdus Salam credit—on account of his faith. The government further refused to acknowledge Salam's existence—on account of his faith.

As Americans, we celebrate Jewish Albert Einstein, Buddhist Steve Jobs, Christian Bill Gates, and atheist Stephen Hawking—regardless of their faith, or lack thereof. We don't look at the precursor faith when appreciating and celebrating their contributions to mankind. Rather, we look at the contributions themselves and celebrate those contributions. This unbiased recognition of greatness is not just some American specialty, but certainly one of any nation with the slightest bit of common sense. This is what human nature drives us to do—champion each other's greatest contributions to humanity to ultimately grow into a society of greatness. To deny such growth is repulsive to human nature and destructive to human progress.

Rather than celebrate their first—and to date only—Nobel Prize winner, or celebrate the fact that perhaps the single greatest scientific discovery of the twentieth century was by a Muslim, or sponsor scholarships in Dr. Salam's name—Pakistan has chosen instead to grab the nearest hammer and chisel and wipe "Muslim" off Dr. Salam's tombstone. After all, such a sacrifice is worth it to ensure no Pakistani is infected with Qadianism.

Yet, Dr. Abdus Salam was proud of his Pakistani heritage. Despite the open antagonism against him, he refused to forsake his Pakistani citizenship even though India and other nations gladly welcomed him. He wanted to give back to Pakistan even more and establish a university. After decades of painful attempts, however, Pakistan's bigotry won, and Dr. Salam returned to his Maker, unsuccessful. The Pakistani government refused to accommodate Dr. Salam's vision—on account of his faith—wasting the priceless opportunity to benefit countless youths through higher education. Countless Pakistani youth have no idea such a legendary hero emerged from their midst. More painfully, however, countless talented youth go to waste because inadequate opportunities exist. All this stemming from a nation's bigotry against a scientific genius—on account of his faith.

Fortunately, Italy graciously invited Dr. Salam to establish such an institution on their soil—and he did. And for the last forty-five years now, The Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ASICTP) has been at the cutting edge of global scientific advancement, particularly in its efforts to advance scientific expertise in developing

nations. Italy, a largely Roman Catholic nation, recognized the incredible contribution to humanity the Muslim scientist Dr. Salam offered—even before he won the Nobel. Over one hundred thousand students from developing nations worldwide have studied at ASICTP. Pakistan, meanwhile, boasts a 50 percent literacy rate[20] and a proud hammer and chisel.

I stared at the scratched-out word for what seemed like an hour. I was fixated. I simply couldn't fathom the level of bigotry I was dealing with. Finally my uncle put his hand on my shoulder to snap me out of my funk.

"Come on, standing here angry won't do anything."

Before moving on, we both offered a silent prayer for Dr. Salam. I recall my prayer distinctly—that I may live to see the day when we can march back into the Heavenly Graveyard and restore Dr. Salam's tombstone to its former condition. Such an act would go beyond honoring Dr. Salam, but it would also honor Pakistan. But for now, such a day is but a dream. Pakistan chokes to death on its own bigotry, and Dr. Salam rests peacefully as the 'wrong' kind of Muslim.

A Reunion of Sorts

I was agitated. "Uncle, was this what you wanted to show me?"

"That's one thing, but not the only thing. Come on."

We headed down another side aisle. Noticing a public restroom I excused myself. As I stepped back out, I nearly lost my balance. Have you ever had a dream that felt so real you couldn't believe it was only a dream? A dream that you saw over and over again, yet couldn't quite pinpoint what it was that you saw? I had one such dream.

In that dream I was playing with my brother Ahmad, who is a year younger than I. It is a bright, beautiful, sunny day. I wore gray clothes and his clothes were red. We chased each other. We were children, young, perhaps no more than three or four. I recall people weeping and a sense of remorse resonating about the crowd. But we didn't care; we were preoccupied in our own entertainment. We found small hills, and chased each other by running up one side, and down the other.

Regaining my senses, I looked around and saw my uncle standing at a grave about fifty meters away. I made my way over to him.

"What were you staring at, Qasim?"

"I've been here before."

"Yes, you have. You were here in 1986."

My dream wasn't a dream. It was a childhood experience that lodged itself in my memory, waiting for the opportunity to be recalled. It was a memory of my grandmother Beiji's funeral, twenty years prior. I used my handkerchief to dust off some dirt from the tombstone, and felt the engraving with my hand, *Rehmat Khatoon.* She died of cancer in 1986.

Forgotten memories began flooding my mind as I remembered the grandmother I'd known for only four years. The drops of water on her grave that I thought was rain were nothing more than my own tears. This was the woman that stood by my grandfather all those years, loving him, supporting him, giving him strength, courage, and guidance. She was not a scholar, but she exhibited unmatched intelligence, compassion, wisdom, and patience—characteristics of far greater importance. Characteristics that led her to the personal peace she sought.

My uncle could tell I was visibly shaken. It was an unexpected reunion.

"Are you okay, Son?"

"Yeah, I think so… I didn't realize today would be such an intense day. You should've warned me." I'd been kneeling by my grandmother's grave. Now I stood up and turned to him, forcing a smile.

He smiled back. "There's one more thing I want to show you, then I promise we'll call it a day."

I obliged and followed his lead. As we continued the tour I turned to him for a third time and remarked, "I still don't understand what you mean that Mian Jee lost family protection when his mother died."

This time he responded surprisingly directly—but to a slightly different question. "You can't see your cousins from that side of the family because they don't want to see us. They want nothing to do with us."

"Because they didn't get along with Mian Jee?"

"No. Because Mian Jee joined the Ahmadiyya Community. Your great-grandmother was the last person keeping our family together. Out of respect for her, my cousins would visit and interact with us. Once she died, family relationships deteriorated. Now that your generation is grown, the relationships are dead."

"Have you tried reaching out to them?"

"Sure, several times. But at this point they don't really care. Once Mian Jee's mother died, they forgot about Mian Jee altogether. He was shunned. As I said, he'd lost any remaining family protection. From then on, he was on his own in every affair."

"But why did that matter? So what if he was on his own?"

"Well, he was the only Ahmadi in his village. The nearest chapter for the Ahmadi Community was… Well, it wasn't near. In a time of riots and murders, it was a risky proposition to be on your own. If a mob attacked his home, normally his extended family would've been there to help protect him. Or, the mob wouldn't attack at all because they'd have to deal with his extended family too."

"And now that they threw him out, word got out."

"Exactly."

We turned off the main walkway and onto a side walkway. Uncle Bashir greeted a gravedigger who was digging a grave. The man responded to the greeting with a brief wave and kept digging. We continued without stopping.

"I still don't get why Mian Jee didn't get a gun. I guess it's just good graces that no one ever tried to kill him."

My uncle stopped abruptly; I bumped into him. Without turning around he asked, "Who told you no one ever tried to kill him?"

7

Pakistan's Hope

"*My message to you all is of hope, courage and confidence. Let us mobilize all our resources in a systematic and organized way and tackle the grave issues that confront us with grim determination and discipline worthy of a great nation.*" — Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Founder of Pakistan

I felt my heart race. Death threats on my grandfather'? My uncle continued as we walked.

"Well, by now Mian Jee's reputation was well known. And it was also well known that he was, for all intents and purposes, on his own. Mullah Maududi's hate campaigns increased year over year, and the pressure likewise increased."

"Pressure on who? Mian Jee?"

"No, not at all. He was firm in his faith. The pressure increased on the government to declare us kafirs."

"Right, but you said the government already defended religious freedom against extremists back in the '50s."

"Well, that was then. But by the early 1970s Maududi's hate campaign reached its peak. He rallied countless mullahs around him and pressed the government relentlessly to declare us kafirs."

I cut him off. "Again, I don't understand. If a standard of freedom has already been set, it should be easier to protect that freedom. So for example, in the 1950s in America they banned segregated schools."

"Meaning?"

"Schools in America used to be split according to race. White kids went to one school, black kids to a separate crappier school—often in shambles. And yet, some so-called Christian organizations supported that segregation. Still, the Supreme Court made it illegal."

"Okay, so?"

"So, if some church organization or even a state today wanted to re-segregate, no matter the pressure, they'd be run out of town."

"That's the tragedy of Pakistan, Son. It was such a beautiful country, such a beautiful dream come true when it was born."

"So what was the change in the 1970s?"

"The government finally folded. Prime Minister Bhutto sold us out."

"Sold us out?"

"Yes. When Bhutto was campaigning, he met with Ahmadiyya community leaders and asked for the Ahmadi vote. This is back when we were allowed to vote."

"We're not allowed to vote anymore?"

"No, but I'll get to that later. So Bhutto asks us to support his campaign. We were a pretty substantial voting bloc back then."

"Sounds simple enough. Politicians seek different faith communities all the time to get their endorsement. What was he promising in return?"

"What any politician promises, really. Fairness, democracy, equality, ending corruption, the usual."

"And the community decided to endorse Bhutto?"

"Yes, most all the members followed suit."

"Did Mian Jee vote for Bhutto?"

"I'm not sure. I mean, I don't see why not. I voted for Bhutto. Most of us did. We trusted he would do the right thing."

"What happened?"

"He began to fold just a few years later. The mullahs were after him to declare us kafirs. He first decided to change the law to forbid anyone not a Muslim from becoming president or prime minster."

"But that's ridiculous. That right there is a human rights violation. And it's stupid. Who's to say a Muslim would make the best president?"

"Exactly, but wait, it gets even more bizarre. So next, the Pakistani Parliament called the Khalifa to come before them and 'prove' we were Muslims."

"That's the most idiotic thing I've ever heard in my entire life."

"He took four of the community's most scholarly people with him to the two-week hearing. Still, only he was allowed to speak."

"Did we…win?" I didn't quite know how else to word it.

"Before the discussions even began, the Khalifa ensured that the entire proceedings were recorded and a full transcript would be available afterwards. The government agreed."

"Sure, because they wanted to show the world how they proved him wrong, right?"

"That, and because it was supposed to be an open hearing anyway."

"What was the resolution of the Khalifa's testimony?"

"Well, at the end of the testimony, after parliament asked him any and all questions they wanted to, a vote was taken and we were declared kafirs because we believe in the Messiah, Ahmad."

"Was it at least only a close vote against us?"

"No, it was unanimously against us. In fact, a representative from every other Muslim sect was present, and they were unanimous in their *fatwa* that we are kafirs, outside the fold of Islam."

"I'm amused they felt the need to play God. Or as if we were Muslims just before the vote but now magically transformed into imposters."

"It really is a shame, isn't it?"

"But I don't understand. What of the testimony and transcript of the proceedings? Why didn't that convince the public at large of this massive unjust act? I'm sure at least in the cities there should've been a public condemnation of this bigotry?"

"Ah, the testimony and transcript—yes, about that. There was no public outcry because they've never seen it. The Pakistani government put it on lockdown."

"They refused to release it?"

"Yes."

"Who refused to release it? The mullahs? The Khalifa?"

"No, no, the government and the mullahs. They refused to let it go public."

"But it's a public record. How do you not let a public record go public? That's the whole point of a public record. It says so right in the name—*public* record.

"Yes, and they put it under vault and key."

"But how can they do that?"

"They did it."

"Then how can we get it?"

"We can't."

"There's gotta be a way, it's been thirty-two years."

"Nope, they refuse. They didn't release it, then citing 'danger to Ahmadis,' and won't release it now for the same lie of an excuse."

"What danger? How is it dangerous to us if it's released?"

"They said that if they released the transcript which allegedly proved we could not defend our faith, then there would be mass riots against us to kill us."

"Wha… What?? Not only has that happened anyway, but also if the transcripts actually proved that, the government would be doing all Ahmadis a favor. They'd be doing all Pakistanis a favor by showing how ignorant and blind we are to believe in something allegedly so ridiculous. I don't buy that reasoning for a second."

"They couldn't face the public, knowing that the law they passed was unjust, and the arguments they propagandized were just that, propaganda. So they hid behind a veil of allegedly protecting Ahmadis."

Pakistan *finally* released the transcript in 2012, nearly forty years after the initial debate. This deliberate delay has since allowed for an entire generation of Pakistanis to be raised under the veil of blasphemy laws and oppression of conscience—which we'll get to in just a moment. For the time being in 2006, I was flabbergasted.

Seeking clarity, I asked, "So the law says that anyone who believes Prophet Muhammad is not the last prophet is now an infidel?"

"Yes."

"And because Ahmadis believe the Messiah has come, they were now infidels according to Pakistan's constitution?"

"Exactly. Bhutto declared us non-Muslim and infamously said that he's solved the 'ninety-year problem' of Ahmadiyyat."

"Ninety-year problem?"

"Yes, the community was ninety years old then and mullahs used it as a rallying cry, that we'd been a cancer to the Muslim world for ninety years. Bhutto got the 'credit' for solving the problem."

"I bet the mullahs were happy."

"Oh, they were thrilled."

"What did the Khalifa do?"

"Well, Bhutto tried to convince him that the decision to declare Ahmadis as kafirs was a temporary thing to appease the mullahs and protect Ahmadis, and that it would be repealed in no time. The Khalifa warned him though, that intolerance doesn't slow down so easily, and that he'd opened Pandora's box. He warned Bhutto that he'd only dug his own grave and sealed his own fate."

"Did Bhutto try to convince him again?"

"Who knows? Maybe, maybe not. It didn't make a difference. The Khalifa was right, intolerance grew. In fact, even Bhutto's wife—who was an Iranian Shia—objected to his decision."

"So he ignores the rule of law *and* he ignores his wife? Not the brightest bulb in the batch."

Uncle Bashir smiled. I continued.

"So essentially, the situation was the same as the 1953 riots, except this time the government aided, not restricted, extremists who wanted to kill Ahmadis?"

"Exactly."

"How in the world does a government function like this?"

"It obviously doesn't."

"So this declaration that we are now kafirs. Is this what caused the attempt on Mian Jee's life?"

"Yes! Extremists finally got what they wanted from the government. The pressure on Ahmadis then started to grow exponentially. And remember, I said that in the rural areas, people were generally more prone to extremism. Muradwal being a rural area, that's exactly what happened."

"What'd they do this time?"

"Mullahs did what they do best—try to incite a riot."

"How?"

"A mob formed in the neighboring town and began marching on Muradwal to come after Mian Jee. Word traveled fast and reached to Muradwal before the mob did. People came running to Mian Jee's house that he had to get out of there—that a mob was coming after him to kill him."

"Was it other Ahmadis that warned him?"

"No, not at all. In fact, it was people in his village. He was the only Ahmadi, remember? But still, though they too considered him a kafir, they knew him to be a good person."

"That's pretty strange...that they recognized him as a good person yet still despised him as a kafir."

"Indeed. But really, it reflects that there was and is good in Pakistanis. I still feel that deep down Pakistanis are noble people. Some just need a push and a reminder. But Mian Jee wouldn't budge. He refused to leave his home. I remember it quite well."

A few townspeople knocked on Mian Jee's door. He answered a minute later.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Mian Jee, there is a mob coming here and they...they intend to kill you unless you repent and return to Islam."

Mian Jee thought for a moment and shook his head, "Let them come after me."

Surprised but not deterred by his blunt reply, the townspeople didn't stop so easily in trying to convince him. They insisted, "Mian Jee, you must come with us. This is unwise."

Mian Jee stood firm, an unconcerned look in his eye.

His townspeople insisted, "At least take our rifles so you can defend yourself against them."

He shook his head no. "I neither trust you nor your rifles."

"Mian Jee, please be reasonable. You cannot possibly defend yourself against an entire mob on your own. I know we believe differently but we're trying to help."

"Believe differently? Yes, we do believe differently. I give you the dignity of not judging you to hell or calling you kafir. You look upon me with contempt and pity. I neither need your pity, and I certainly don't need any help from those who think I'm a kafir destined for hell. I would sooner die for my faith than live, knowing I relied on those who spit on my beliefs."

With that, Mian Jee shut the door to his home, and despite continued knocking, he refused. His fellow townsmen, however, couldn't bring themselves to leave Mian Jee so exposed. Unsure of what to do, they went to the police to solicit their help.

"A mob is coming to kill Mian Sirajudeen. You must stop them."

"Why do they want to kill him?"

"Because he is a Mirzai."

"I see. Any other reason?"

"No, but they are coming for sure, you must stop them."

"Well, we'll see what we can do. Things are quite busy around here but we'll keep an eye on it."

"But you don't understand, this mob is on its way right now. We don't have time to waste."

"I said, we'll look into it. Now if you'll excuse us we have work to do."

In actuality, the police wanted a bribe before they bothered to assist—particularly to assist an Ahmadi. Destitute villagers typically don't have bribe money lying around. In short, the police told them "tough luck." But still, the mob was coming, with rifles, torches, and a zeal to kill any Mirzai in their path. They tried to go back to Mian Jee again to convince him to leave, but left once more with a door shut on their faces, and an angrier Mian Jee. Eventually, they came to a realization. If Mian

Jee wouldn't solicit their help, they would have to take matters into their own hands.

Mian Jee, meanwhile, waited patiently—appreciating what he realized were his last moments on Earth. All these years he'd sought his Creator, done his best to serve his fellow man. And now, he could stare death in the eyes and literally say he had beliefs worth dying for.

Just as he'd experienced at the mob riot in 1953, at first he heard faint chanting in the distance. Like a rolling thunder, the noise became louder, more distinct. Before long, he could hear the chants and slogans clearly.

"Death to Mirzais!"

"Honor Islam and kill Mirzais!"

"Kill the bastard Mirzais!"

Mian Jee relaxed on his charpai on the roof. He was drinking a hot cup of chai from his favorite mug. No sugar of course. With every sip the mob grew closer—rifles, torches, and all. With every moment, his time grew shorter. Mian Jee reflected over his life journey, how far he'd come, what he'd been through. If this was it for him, he was content. Unlike his illness some forty-five years prior, this time, he was content. He'd fulfilled his promise to his Creator. He'd done his best to find Him, and in his heart and soul, found peace. His mind was free of regret.

The mob grew closer. They'd been within earshot for a few minutes already. Now, the yelling grew louder. Mian Jee climbed down from the roof and went inside his home. He smiled at his wife and they sat down together...waiting. The mob grew closer.

Mian Jee waited. Beiji waited. They'd prepared themselves for this moment. The yelling grew louder. The insults, more incessant. Their anger almost tangible. The mob grew closer.

Mian Jee and Beiji reflected on their final moments. Closer. They reflected on their three children who died, and on the six they'd been blessed with. Closer. Mian Jee thought about how alone he felt all those years ago, lying on his deathbed. Today he was at peace. Closer. Beiji thought about the choice she made twenty-five years prior. Today she was at peace. Closer.

The police were invisible. The mob grew closer in all their fury. This was it. The mob would arrive any moment now. Mian Jee and Beiji waited for the door to be broken down. For the mob to barge through; who knew what would happen after that.

So they waited.

And they waited.

And they waited some more.

And suddenly, the chanting and insults began to become quieter. Something was wrong. They should've been dead by now. Mian Jee rushed to the door to see what happened. To his exasperation, there was no mob. Instead, the very people he'd forbidden from protecting him stood silently outside his door, protecting him. Rifles at their side and a look of guilt on their faces, none had the courage to explain the situation to Mian Jee. The mob grew quieter yet as it moved away from Muradwal.

"What have you done?!" Mian Jee demanded.

At first no one spoke up. Unbeknownst to Mian Jee they'd taken matters into their own hands. When the mob reached the Muradwal border, they formed a militia to meet them.

"You cannot pass through this town," Mian Jee's townsfolk declared.

"We have no quarrel with you Muslims. But we must cleanse your village of the Mirzai who contaminates it—Mian Sirajudeen. Move aside!"

"You will not pass through this town! He is our citizen and we give you no permission to harm him."

"Has he asked you to protect him?"

"No."

"Does he know you are protecting him?"

"No."

"Then stand aside! He is a filthy Mirzai that must be killed. Let us pass!"

"Over our dead bodies."

The small militia stood firm. They were easily outnumbered probably ten to one, but controlled the entrance to the town.

"Is it a bribe you want? We can negotiate a deal."

"We want no bribe, nor would we accept such. Go back where you came from. You will not harm Mian Jee!"

The militia raised their weapons, pointing them directly at the mob leaders. One, a particularly vicious mullah, was the main culprit—the main instigator. Incidentally, he was later discovered to be a pedophile, caught molesting two young boys. The very mob he led today later chased him out of town some years later—he was never heard from again.

But for now the vicious mullah ruled the mob. Recognizing the conviction with which the militia stood, he wisely backed down, but not without spewing more hatred.

"You will burn in hell for protecting this Mirzai! Curses be upon you. Curses! May you all suffer horrible, horrible deaths of humiliation and shame." With that, he turned to the mob. "Oh, fellow brothers, these

hypocrites would rather burn in hell and protect a Mirzai, than fulfill their obligation and kill kafirs. We do not need to shed our blood for these hypocrites. Let us find another route."

With that, the mob traversed the outskirts of the small village of Muradwal and bypassed Mian Jee's home. Their incessant yelling of insulting slogans was loud enough to reach Mian Jee's home. But long before Mian Jee realized he would not be killed, his fellow townsmen had already risked their own lives to ensure it so.

Meanwhile, Mian Jee was furious. His townsmen had never seen him so angry. That guilty look on their faces was no accident. They knew he'd feel like they violated his chance at martyrdom, at dying for his beliefs. Mian Jee's pride was not in running but in owning up to the consequences of his action to join the community. And they took that from him.

With every new layer of my own ancestry revealed to me, I understood a new level of sacrifice. I transitioned not just from accepting or understanding why one would practice his or her faith despite opposition, but I began to admire their courage as well. I began to truly understand, for the first time in my life, the priceless value of freedom of conscience. It is a value that, for many individuals, extends beyond the value of their own lives. After all, what is living if it is under another's will?

I also began to realize the hope for Pakistan: its noble people. Those townspeople that protected my grandfather did so while risking their own lives. They could have sat idle, but they did not. That mob could just as easily have turned on them. The townspeople knew this. But they proceeded anyhow. And while they refused to accept my grandfather as a "real Muslim," they recognized an injustice for what it was. More importantly perhaps, Mian Jee won their hearts even if he hadn't won their minds. Such people who love humanity for the sake of humanity exist in Pakistan—to this day they exist. There's no doubt about it. What's right is not always popular, and that fear of unpopularity sadly stifles bystanders from speaking up—and that is a shame. But this time, bystanders spoke up, and it made all the difference in the world.

Buried somewhere deep in Pakistan is a movement of people who care about human welfare above religious dogma. And they are willing to risk their lives for the greater good. These noble people exist, and millions of Pakistan's oppressed minorities are waiting for them to rise up and speak out for their fellow Pakistanis, just as those townspeople spoke up for my grandfather that day.

My uncle continued. "Now obviously, we, his children, were happy. Who wants to see their parents killed? But again, all this was just the beginning. Perhaps Mian Jee knew this and just didn't want to be around for when things got worse."

The thought that things could yet get worse was frightening. But they did—much worse. My grandfather was fortunate that his life was spared. Others, however, were not so lucky. From Pakistan's birth in 1947 until 1974, *only* seventeen Ahmadis were martyred for their faith. In 1974 alone, however, twenty-nine Ahmadis were murdered, countless more injured, tortured, boycotted, and discriminated against. It was, to date, the single most brutal year in the Ahmadiyya Community's history. On May 29, 1974, students in Maududi's terrorist organization's youth wing launched a vicious attack on Ahmadis at the Rabwah Railway Station.[21] This attack inspired other attacks, triggering a yearlong nationwide violent campaign against Ahmadis. The following day, twenty-two shops and five houses belonging to Ahmadis in Rabwah's neighboring town Chiniot were ransacked. Two days after the railway station attack, nearly fifty shops belonging to Ahmadis nationwide were razed to the ground. Dozens of Ahmadi students were expelled merely on account of their faith and hundreds of shops were destroyed. Even food and water supplies were cut off to Rabwah and other predominantly Ahmadi areas to push Ahmadis to the brink of starvation. And this was all in addition to the ongoing threat of murder to which every Ahmadi was subject. This was all even before Ahmadis were declared kafirs.

Thus, after Ahmadis were "officially" declared kafirs or "non-Muslims" some months later on September 7, 1974, the murders continued and the persecution yet increased.[22]

"I'm just amazed how the government saw the rising violence against Ahmadis, and instead of defending our rights, sided wholly with mullahs. It is just mind boggling."

Uncle Bashir continued. "And the anti-Ahmadi propaganda only got worse after we were declared kafirs. That mob attack didn't succeed in killing Mian Jee, but they fulfilled their goal of spreading more hatred of Ahmadis, planting seeds for more hatred in the future."

"Did others try to kill him now?"

"No, not him. The next time they came, they came after his grandchildren."

Eyes wide, I turned to my uncle. "Who did they try to kill? Which cousin?"

"Salman."

"They tried to kill Salman?!" (Salman is not his real name as he still lives in Pakistan.)

"Sadly, yes. Remember I mentioned Mian Jee's neighbor, Abdul Rahman?"

"Yes?"

"His son Anser took a chain to Salman's head, leaving a massive gash. Meanwhile, he continued to berate him for being an Ahmadi. Some of Mian Jee's sympathizers managed to drag Salman away before he was beaten to death."

My mind flashed back to the bully I faced on that school bus. How was Salman's bully any different? I realized he wasn't, but the surrounding world for Salman was different. I lived in a nation that protected freedom of religion—Salman lived in a nation that demonized his faith altogether. I know Salman well, and felt pained that I'd never asked him about this horrible event.

We came to a stop. I looked up and saw my grandfather's final resting place. Died, February 28, 1977—some five years before I was born.

Standing at that tombstone was a painful moment. I felt regret for losing someone I never knew. At the same time, it brought closure to see his final resting place in the heavenly graveyard. I offered my prayers for him, and thanked God for giving me an ancestor about whom I could be so proud. I took out my handkerchief and wiped away some dust and dirt from his tombstone. Neither my uncle nor I said a word as we stood there for what seemed like hours.

As we turned to leave the cemetery my uncle remarked, "You know, if it matters, Master Imam Ali died in May 1974."

I smiled. "So he died while still a 'real' Muslim."

Uncle Bashir nodded with a smile of his own.

In the days before I left on that trip to Pakistan, I recorded a video of my most personal ambitions. I shared it with no one. Among many promises I made to myself, one was to discover my ancestry and understand my identity. It seemed modest enough, but I had no idea what was in store. The past several days were a whirlwind—beyond anything I could have imagined. They were painful days and that pain was a necessary learning process.

But I missed something. At the time, I thought I'd gleaned a comprehensive picture of my birth nation and ancestry. I was wrong. Instead, it was just the tip of the iceberg. Mian Sirajudeen's chapter was over for now. But by 1977, the horrifying reality of religious persecution and the suffering of my fellow Pakistanis was just beginning.

8

Three Dollars

"*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*" — Jesus Christ

I've become calloused to hate mail. To this day, ignorant people try to delegitimize the persecution Ahmadis, and Pakistan's religious minorities in general, face. They claim that since *only* a few dozen or no more than one hundred Ahmadis are killed each year for their faith, it is "not that big a deal." Why? Because one hundred thousand civilians were killed in the Iraq War, nearly three thousand Americans died in 9/11, and two hundred thousand plus died in the 2004 South Asian tsunami. Therefore, so what if a few Ahmadis or Christians are murdered here and there? We've got bigger problems to deal with.

This argument stems from ignorance and bigotry and nothing more. When did suffering become a contest of who has it worse? Each loss of life is a tragedy in its own right. Human suffering in one place is not lessened simply because other human suffering exists elsewhere. No one in their right mind says, "Well, thirty thousand Americans die in gun violence every year, so 9/11 really wasn't that bad after all." Whenever even one Ahmadi, or one Christian, or one Shia, or one Hindu, or one atheist, or any one person of any other ideological belief is murdered or persecuted for his or her choice of belief, it is an inexcusable tragedy. No one deserves such a fate. I've gotten used to such ignorant emails by now, so people can feel free to continue to send them.

Uncle Bashir and I walked in silence. Out of the Heavenly Graveyard, across the street, past the busy intersection, and back to the living quarters across the street from Tahir Heart Institute. As I reflected, my thoughts turned to Beiji. My uncle must have known what I was thinking as he chimed in.

"You know, Beiji lived for another nine years after Mian Jee died. She saw everything Mian Jee saw, and more. Bhutto's fall from power, his hanging—"

"Wait, Bhutto was hanged? Like, literally?"

"The Khalifa warned him, he'd opened Pandora's box."

"But what does that mean?"

"It means he reaped what he sowed. I don't think any person has done Pakistan a bigger disservice than Bhutto."

"What do you consider was his disservice? Declaring us kafirs?"

"It wasn't just that he declared us kafirs. It was the door that opened as a result. That opened door allowed mosque and state to mix. The persecution of Ahmadis was just the beginning. Now, no religious minority in Pakistan was safe. Christians, Hindus, atheists, Shias—all were at risk."

I thought about pushing the issue to get a better understanding but I chose instead to let it go. I had more to chew on than I could handle at the moment.

A short while longer and we arrived back at my uncle's place. I found myself restless. I'd lost my appetite. So many more questions remained unanswered but I needed time to process what I'd learned. Patience is a virtue, but unfortunately not one I'd managed to grasp at the moment.

My ten-year-old cousin, Shireen, awaited me. She needed me to walk her back to my aunt's home. Rather than stay and force down a meal I wasn't feeling, I gladly offered to take her. Besides, I thought to myself, after today's roller coaster, a conversation with a ten-year-old might be a good way to unwind.

Rather than call a rickshaw, the thought of a calm walk actually seemed inviting. Maybe that's when I knew I was really out of it. I headed down the usual alley towards the same main street but Shireen called out to stop.

"No, let's go this way, Qasim *bhai*. I know a shortcut."

"Bhai" is Urdu for "brother." It is customary in Pakistan to add "bhai" after someone's name when speaking to someone older, or just out of respect in general. Likewise, *baji* means "sister" and is used in a similar manner as "bhai."

"Are you sure? I only know this way."

"I go this way all the time with my brother. It's fine, don't worry."

I shrugged my shoulders and followed her lead.

We went the direction opposite my usual route and exited the gated community from the other end. So far I was familiar with this area.

I'd walked this path many times before to offer my daily prayers at a well-known mosque, Masjid Mubarak, one of the first built in Rabwah. It is of modest size, removed from major streets, and has a serene quality about it one has to experience to enjoy. It is of historical significance. In 1967, elections for the third Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Community were held in Masjid Mubarak, as were elections for the fourth Khalifa in 1982. Of personal significance, in the coming years I held my *Nikkah* (marriage) ceremony in this mosque.

Masjid Mubarak is generally guarded around the clock for security purposes. A time existed when this wasn't necessary. A time also existed when the Khalifa resided in Pakistan safely—but even that changed as early as the 1950s. One afternoon in 1955, the late second Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Community, Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad, was leading prayers as usual in Masjid Mubarak. Part of the Muslim prayer involves prostrating face down—much like how Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane the night of his arrest.

The Khalifa did not then have security detail. After all, what sort of insane individual attacks another during prayer? But perhaps I've answered my own question. The Khalifa led prayer and prostrated. All but one individual followed suit.

With the Khalifa face down, the assassin wasted no time. At first, few, if any, were aware that someone had jumped up. But as the assassin moved quickly towards the Khalifa several congregants realized something was painfully wrong. The assassin leapt at the Khalifa, raising his dagger above his head for maximum force. And just as the Khalifa raised his head from prostration, the assassin thrust his arm forward, burying the dagger deep into the Khalifa's neck. His blood soaked his etchkin and the ground. Not content with the stab alone, the assassin twisted the dagger, breaking the tip inside.

Despite the vicious stab, the Khalifa did not panic, nor scream in pain. The assassin moved to stab him again. But in that instant the congregants tackled him to the ground and helped the Khalifa to his feet. The assailant was subdued, but the damage was done.

One of my mentors, Rashid Ahmad American, a black American convert to Islam, was in Rabwah in 1955. He is now nearing ninety and enjoying life with his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren in Milwaukee. We met at the Milwaukee mosque on Fond du Lac Avenue to discuss the incident. Mr. American entered Masjid Mubarak moments after the stabbing.

"I stumbled into the mosque just as they began to carry the Khalifa away. I could see the fury and pain in every Ahmadi's eyes. But

when I looked at the Khalifa, despite the blood gushing from his neck and immense pain he was surely in, he remained calm and sober."

"Was he in shock? Was he aware of what just happened to him?"

"Oh, he was most certainly aware. As they carried him away, he stopped them. He looked at the assassin on the ground and shook his head. Then, calmly, he instructed those holding him, "'Don't kill the fool.'"

And despite the pain and anger each Ahmadi felt for not stopping the assassination attempt in time to prevent injury—each obeyed the Khalifa's order with perfect submission. The assassin was subdued and handed over to the police without a scratch on him.

Mr. American continued. "Now after this it was decided that the Khalifa would have round-the-clock security detail to prevent future attacks. Fortunately, by God's grace, the Khalifa lived. He needed surgery on his neck, but he lived. The knife missed his jugular by mere millimeters."

"What of the assassin?"

"He was convicted of trying to kill the Khalifa, simple as that."

"Well, it's good to hear that the court system actually worked back then."

"It did in this case. But, you know, an interesting thing happened. The Khalifa asked us to find out if the assassin had any family. It turned out the assassin had a wife and several small children."

"So?"

"Well, if the assassin is in prison, who was going to provide for his family?"

"I don't know, the same people that put him up to commit murder?"

"You think people who pushed him to commit murder could also have the compassion to care for an un-earning single mother and her children?"

"I guess you have a point. But anyway, I don't see how that was anyone's problem but theirs."

"Maybe, but the Khalifa ordered that they be provided for."

"Pardon?"

"From his personal account. The Khalifa sent them a stipend from his own money to cover their cost of living and expenses, both for the assassin's wife and his children—"

"Umm… Pardon?"

"The Khalifa sent the family a stipend every mo—"

"No, I mean I heard you. I'm just not understanding why?"

"It's called 'compassion,' my brother. They did nothing wrong. Think of how much pain they were in that their father and husband did such a horrible thing. What the Khalifa did was a reflection of his compassion for humanity."

I remained silent.

Mother Teresa once said, "If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway." It seemed, sadly, that such examples of compassion were lost on too many Muslim leaders in Pakistan. The Khalifa, however, did the right thing.

As far as the extremist who tried to kill the Khalifa was concerned, for now that extremist was the exception. It wouldn't be long, however, before the extremist's mentality would represent the majority in Pakistani leadership. Indeed, one deranged individual, just like him, would soon become Pakistan's undisputed ruler—its dictator. And when that happened, the Khalifa would be forced to leave Pakistan altogether.

My mind snapped back to reality as Shireen called out to me. "Jeez, Qasim bhai, you walk so slow. Hurry up!"

She grabbed my hand and pulled me along. We left Masjid Mubarak behind and ducked down a side alley. A minute later we came to a train crossing. A train was coming so we waited. Children, however, were playing on the tracks.

I turned to Shireen. "Shouldn't someone tell those kids to get off the tracks?"

"It's a game they play."

"What game?"

"Just watch. First one to jump off loses."

"Oh, and I suppose the kid who stays out in front of a forty-thousand-ton train wins? They're either that bored or that stupid."

"Probably more boredom than stupidity."

As the train lumbered closer the younger kids jumped off with an excited squeal and ran back to a safe distance. Soon the ground subtly shook, scaring just about all the kids into jumping off. Yet, two remained, both daring the other to concede.

Suddenly, one of them sat down on the tracks, feet inside—an attempt to show that he wasn't going anywhere. The other child stood his ground, but his anxiety was visible. The train—though it was only moving about twenty-five miles an hour—blared its horn to get the kids to move. Neither budged.

It was less than one hundred meters away and blasted its horn again. Neither budged. The game of chicken dragged on. At a distance of about fifty meters the train blared its horn again, this time non-stop.

Finally, the child that was standing cracked and jumped off. The other child, however, sat comfortably on the tracks. He'd won the game, but he wasn't done showboating. The train moved closer yet and he finally stood up. It was now thirty meters away. Children screamed at him to move quickly—genuinely fearing he'd be hit. The train horn blared without interruption. I flinched and thought about turning away, or at least covering Shireen's eyes.

"He's minced meat," I thought to myself. Fifteen meters away. Somehow, ever so calmly, the child turned and stepped off the track, a fraction of a second before the train would have run him over. The train conductor yelled curses at him as he went by. The child paid no attention. The younger children jumped for joy, in awe and astonishment. I shook my head in dismay.

"These kids need to find a hobby."

"Where are they supposed to go?" Shireen replied.

"I don't know, play a sport or something?"

"They're poor, from poor families. Most live in shacks. They can hardly afford food, let alone sports gear."

This bothered me for numerous obvious reasons. The Ahmadiyya Community has a strong youth wing designed to keep kids engaged in productive growth and development activities. Growing up in Chicago, many of my mentors were my youth group leaders. I was frustrated that Rabwah's youth wing leaders were letting these kids essentially go to waste (or so I thought). I pleaded my case to Shireen.

"Okay, fair enough. Then what about getting involved with the Ahmadiyya youth group? What's stopping them there? And for that matter, why aren't the youth leaders working to encourage them to get active within the community?"

"Umm, Qasim bhai… These kids aren't Ahmadi."

This realization caught me off guard, as the vast majority of Rabwah's residents were Ahmadi Muslims.

"Oh, so they're Sunni Muslims."

"No, wrong again."

"Shia?"

"Qasim bhai, they're Christians."

"Oh! Wow. There's Christians in Rabwah?"

"Why wouldn't there be?"

"I don't know… I guess it just never occurred to me."

The train finally passed. Shireen and I continued our walk. After crossing the tracks we ducked into another side alley. Someone's chickens ran loose past us, their owner chasing them and yelling at them in a

dialect of Punjabi I barely understood. I looked up and saw my Aunt Zakia, Shireen's mother, coming the other way. She didn't realize I was dropping Shireen off.

"What are you doing walking Shireen back? I was headed over there to pick her up."

"I thought I'd save you the trip. Shireen wanted to go and I did too, so we just headed over."

"Well, saves me the trip." She joined Shireen and I as we headed back to her place. I thought it prudent to ask Aunt Zakia about the kids playing on the tracks, but Shireen turned my attention to something else.

"Look, over there, the symbol of Christians."

I looked up to see a bright red cross on the side of a small structure—one I could only assume was a church. The cross was located in an obscure location, so only those close by could see it. Still, it stood out in stark contrast with the dull cement and clay background.

I turned to my aunt. "How many Christians are there in Pakistan?"

"I don't know, but there's a good amount."

"How are they treated? I saw these kids playing on the train tracks. Didn't seem right."

"You think those kids play on train tracks because they have so much else going on? You see that and have to ask how they're treated?"

"Well, no one was forcing them to. I have to believe they have other options. Why not organize a Christian's association or something?" In my mind I thought of the YMCA and the many positive contributions they make to their respective towns and cities.

"Sure, some have other options. Some don't. These children are in difficult positions. The problem is they have to be extremely careful. Let's say they do organize. If some mullah files a blasphemy case against them, they don't really have the support that Ahmadis have of a strong community. And even with that strong community, police look the other way when an Ahmadi is murdered. It just isn't an easy black and white answer."

I didn't like what I heard and frankly found it hard to believe. Perhaps that's what happens when you've lived in the American bubble your entire life. Sure, my experience doesn't speak for all Americans, but so far this trip had repeatedly reinforced the fact that I'd lived in a bubble too long. I spotted a young woman carrying a heavy load and decided to find out for myself.

I leaned in to my aunt. "Is she Christian?"

"Yes, why do you ask?"

I didn't respond. Instead, I walked up to the woman. "*Asalaamo Alai*—umm, I mean, hi, excuse me, ma'am, can I help you carry that?"

She gave me a bewildered look and without saying a word turned the other way.

I turned to follow her and insisted, "No, I just want to help, can I—" She bolted.

I took a few more steps but to no avail. She ignored me completely and hurried down the alley. In a few seconds she turned a corner and went out of sight. I stopped, bewildered, and with a guilty look on my face—feeling like I'd tried to rob her. Confused, I looked back to see my aunt smiling and Shireen laughing at me.

"What? What'd I do?" I threw my arms out in exasperation.

My aunt shook her head. "What are you thinking, Qasim?"

"I just wanted to talk to her! Why did she run away like that?"

"Because you're in Pakistan. And you're a random Muslim guy. And you're talking to a Christian woman. That doesn't happen here. She has no idea who you are or what you're up to."

"What could I possibly be up to?"

"Anything. Maybe you're a mullah looking to use blasphemy laws to settle a personal vendetta. Maybe you like her and want to convert her, forcibly or otherwise. Or maybe you want to force yourself on her."

I shuddered. "I was called a terrorist yesterday and today I'm forcing myself on women?"

"You were called a terrorist yesterday?"

"No, nothing, never mind. Go on, what were you saying?"

"Anyway, of course I'm generalizing some, but these things are based on reality. Christians, especially Christian women in Pakistan, are high risk. The government doesn't care, and like I said, support structures really don't exist. If you were to do anything to her, she would be at your mercy."

It felt painfully awkward to hear my aunt say what she did. Still, I wasn't done trying to hear it firsthand from a Pakistani Christian. And fortunately, it wasn't long before I had another chance, as I soon saw a middle-aged man cleaning a gutter. Once again, I turned and whispered to my aunt, "Is he Christian?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Because in Pakistan, no one cleans gutters except Christians."

"What? Really?"

"It's work that the government only hires Christians to do."

"Only hires Christians? So if I applied for a job as a janitor to clean gutters I wouldn't get it?"

"No, you wouldn't apply for that job in the first place."

"Why not?"

"Because—assuming you weren't Ahmadi—you could get a better paying, less laborious, job. And besides, you couldn't live off a janitor salary."

"How much is it?"

"They pay 'em a few hundred rupees a day. Maybe two hundred a day."

In other words, three dollars. Pakistani Christians paid for their daily food, water, clothing, medicine, and shelter on less than what we spend on a cup of coffee at Starbucks. Things like transportation and education were a far cry. And to be fair, poverty is rampant in Pakistan. It isn't *only* Christians who live off of three dollars a day. But this was the reality I was experiencing firsthand.

"Will he run too if I try to talk to him?"

"No, probably not, but—"

I didn't wait for her to finish and made my way over to the Christian man. Not wanting a repeat of the previous incident with the Christian woman, I approached him slowly so he could see me coming. He wore a turban and kept a long beard, and a typical *shalwar kameez* outfit—loose pajama-style pants and a shirt that extended down to his knees. If he walked into a grocery store in America hardly anyone would recognize him as a Christian. He would probably be stereotyped closer to a Taliban terrorist than a Christian.

"Excuse me…sir. I don't mean to bother you but…" He looked up with a sort of confused look. I guess it wasn't common for a random American stranger to strike up such a conversation. "…I wanted to ask… How are you?"

It was obvious to him I wasn't from around here. Again, my accented Urdu likely gave me away. Perhaps his curiosity got the best of him. Whatever the reason, he stopped his work and stood up. His face was covered in grime, as was his beard and most of his clothing. Unsure of what to do I asked again, "How are you?"

He replied somewhat unsure, "*Alhumdolillah*, I am fine."

His use of the Arabic expression "alhumdolillah" caught me off guard. It translates to "All praise belongs to Allah." I sighed. My aunt was mistaken. This man wasn't Christian, but evidently the one non-Christian to clean gutters in all of Pakistan. I turned to give her a look and whispered out, "He's not Christian."

I whispered too loud. Before she could respond, the man standing in front of me spoke up. "Who's not Christian?"

"Umm... You, aren't Christian, right?"

"Of course I am, alhumdolillah, I am Christian. I was born a Christian and will be Christian until the day I die and no one will ever convince me otherwise!"

He was passionate.

"But why did you say alhumdolillah?"

"Is it not true?"

"Well, sure, okay, but..." Then it dawned on me. "Allah" means "God," and for Eastern Christians, the two were interchangeable. In fact, in Malaysia, extremist clerics have brutally attacked Christians for their use of "Allah" while referring to God. I looked closer and saw a small cross dangling from his neck.

"Well, that's great! I'm... My name is Qasim. I'm sorry I was mistaken, I just wasn't sure."

I put out my hand to shake his. His hands were blackened in dirt and filth—he tried to quickly scrub them off on his clothes. It didn't make much of a difference. I reached out and embraced his hand anyway. It felt rough and jagged, and wet with whatever he'd been cleaning. It was a farmer's handshake. He had a firm grip and smiled a wide, soft grin. A few of his teeth were missing; a few were black. It occurred to me that he had likely never been to the dentist on account of cost alone. Still, it was a beautiful, genuine smile.

"I'm not from here. I'm from America." I smiled back at him.

His hospitality kicked in. "Oh, wonderful! Wonderful, thank you for coming to our country."

That phrase resonated with me: "our country." He considered Pakistan his country and said so without hesitation. I admired his pride.

"I wanted to know if I could ask you about being a Christian in Pakistan?"

He raised an eyebrow. "Such as?"

I doubted he'd ever been asked this before. I could sense his guard going up. "I want to understand what life is like here for you. If I ask anything you don't feel comfortable answering, then don't and that would be just fine."

He nodded, indicating his reserved approval. I wasn't sure where to begin. A generic question came to mind.

"So, were you born Christian?"

"Yes," was his blunt reply.

"I've heard that Christians are persecuted in Pakistan."

"Yes, we are."

He was kind, but wasn't giving me much to work with.

"How does it affect your faith?"

"We are strong in our faith. We trust in Jesus."

His answers were short and I could tell he was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the line of questioning. "Can you tell me what kind of persecution?"

That question pushed him too far beyond his comfort zone. "Why are you asking?"

I took a deep breath, trying to form a clear explanation, one that wouldn't intimidate. "I want to try to understand. I don't think many Americans know or understand what is going on here. I want to understand and I want to help Americans understand. I want to help people outside of Pakistan understand. I want to help—" I was about to say "you" but realized it was quite pompous of me to assume he needed or wanted my help. I stopped and waited for his reply. He was thinking, and seemed reluctant to answer. The awkwardness got to me first.

"It's okay, I don't want to be rude. You don't have to answer."

He remained silent.

"Why do you live here? Why not leave?"

"Where would we go?"

"Well, you could..." Again, I didn't know what to say. He was right. On three dollars a day, picking up and moving wasn't exactly easy.

"Why do you work this job? Why not look for another job?"

He laughed, but also expressed some annoyance at the question. "What other job? I either work this job or my family starves."

I realized just how far I'd pushed his hospitality. In hindsight, I could see how frustrating my questions might have been. To him I appeared as one who couldn't possibly understand his struggle and problems. And he was probably right.

I looked up and felt a drop of rain. Clouds were moving in fast.

"Qasim, we should get going," my aunt called out to me.

"Just one second," I called back.

I asked the main question I wanted an answer to. "What can I do to help stop the persecution?"

His answer tore a hole in my heart. He paused for a moment and looked down. After contemplating, he looked up at me, dead in the eye, and said with complete conviction, "There's nothing."

He turned around without saying another word and went back to the gutter to finish his work, collect his three dollars, and buy food for his family for the evening.

"But there must be something!" I called out after him. He ignored me. "Come on!" I stood for a moment, hoping he'd offer a response but he instead remained focused on his work. Disappointed, to say the least, I turned around slowly and marched back to my aunt and cousin.

Shireen spoke up. "You get what you were looking for from him?" We continued our stroll back home. I shook my head no. It began to drizzle slightly.

"I was trying to tell you that he wouldn't give you much," my aunt offered.

"I don't understand why he was so reluctant to talk. What was the danger here? I'm not going to 'force myself' on him." It sounded ludicrous to say.

"He doesn't know you. He has no idea what you're up to. What you're going to do with whatever he told you."

"That's the same thing you said about the Christian woman!" I insisted.

"And it holds true here too, simple as that."

"Okay, so what if he doesn't know me? He knows I'm not the government."

"No, he doesn't know that. You very well could be. You could be hired by some mullah to catch him blaspheming Islam."

"Oh, come on, this is ridiculous. That's borderline paranoia. That's total paranoia."

My aunt shook her head. "You don't seem to understand, Qasim. You don't understand how fragile safety is here. All a cleric has to do is file one complaint with the police and announce it publicly, and all hell breaks loose for them. It isn't rule of law. It's rule of mullah."

She was right. Even as you read this, Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of four, languishes in a filthy Pakistani prison. On the mere accusation that she insulted Prophet Muhammad, clerics filed a blasphemy charge against her and threw her in prison. Despite international pressure, the lack of any evidence of her "crime," and the downright cowardly and immoral act of arresting a person for a real or perceived insult, Asia Bibi sits on death row. All this because a mullah filed a blasphemy case against her on account of her Christian faith.

But on that walk, on that day, I didn't yet understand how such bigotry was possible. It was such an alien concept. "Okay, what if...if I go talk to him again? Maybe if I can get him to trust me, he'll open up?"

"Maybe you should stop trying to play hero and calm down. Look, you don't need to be discussing religion with anyone here,

especially people you don't know. You are risking trouble. Just let him be and watch your own tongue."

We cut through a few more side alleys and arrived back at my aunt's place. I was frustrated. Now, in addition to everything I'd talked to Uncle Bashir about this morning, my mind was stuck on the Christian street sweeper. So much for unwinding. I felt tenser than ever.

9

Exporting Extremism

"*Death and love are the two things that bear the good man to heaven.*" — Michelangelo

My trip to discover my ancestry was turning out to be far more than I'd imagined. And the reality of religious persecution in Pakistan was turning out to be far worse than I'd understood. My mind was racing, stressed, and in desperate need of an antidote.

I hadn't run in a few weeks now, and it was eating at me. Fortunately, I'd left a bag of running gear at my aunt's place. As I started to head out, my cousin Mubasher, Shireen's older brother, pulled up to the house on his bicycle.

"Hey, where are you going? And why are you dressed like that?"

"Going for a run. Dressed like what? What's wrong with how I'm dressed?"

"Well, for starters, you're not wearing any pants."

It's true, I wasn't. "Yeah, I'm wearing running shorts. Why would I wear pants when I go running?"

"Shorts? That's an underwear, man."

"No, no, it's not an underwear. They're just short shorts. Yes, I know, I admit it. I wear short shorts. But it's only for running...and maybe for basketball, sometimes, but really only for running."

"That's not going to fly here."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning you'll get laughed and ridiculed at, and you might get in trouble for exposing yourself."

"Exposing myself? What?"

"Well, yeah. That's what people here will think of those shorts. This isn't America. The least you could do is wear a decent shirt."

So I was wearing a tank top. Sue me.

"Well, is there anywhere I can run—a forest trail or something, away from Rabwah?"

"Rabwah's in the middle of a desert, where do you suppose this magical forest might come from?"

I sighed. "Well, whatever, anywhere at all secluded and out of the way?"

"Sorry, man, there's no… Actually…actually, there is one place you can go. Wait here, I'll be right out and we'll go."

"What, you're going to run with me?"

"Ha, God, no. I'll ride my bike while you run. We'll see who gets tired first."

I smiled. "Fair enough, but hurry up because I want to get going and the rain is only getting worse." The drizzle had graduated to a gentle rainfall.

Mubasher is a few years older than I. He holds the prestigious title of *Hafiz*, one who has memorized the Qur'an in Arabic from end to end. It is no small feat by any stretch. This trip to Pakistan was the first opportunity we'd had to connect since we were young children.

On my way to Pakistan, I'd visited India. Mubasher and I, along with roughly seventy-five thousand other Ahmadi Muslims worldwide, attended the Indian Jalsa Salana (which literally means "annual convention") in Qadian. The Ahmadiyya Community's holy founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, started this annual convention in 1891.

Mubasher and I reunited in Qadian. I don't think either of us recognized each other at first. I had a beard and long hair. He had a mustache, the likes of which would make Burt Reynolds jealous. In fact, my first exposure to the painful form of religious oppression in Pakistan was with Mubasher, while we were in Qadian, India, no less.

Qadian is a tiny and remote village in the Punjab region with a population of a few thousand. Prior to my 2005 visit, even the Internet was new at a blazing 14.4 kbps. (For those under twenty years old, yes, the Internet was that slow once upon a time.)

Running water and electricity are generally available. Horses and bicycle rickshaws are the main modes of transportation. It is an important town for Ahmadi Muslims because Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was born, and buried, there. If there were ever a safe place for Ahmadi Muslims to practice their faith, it would theoretically be Qadian—theoretically.

One evening, Mubasher and I took a stroll through Qadian's main marketplace (I'd have some explaining to do if I returned to the States without gifts for my family). A friend of Mubasher's, Amir, joined us. Before long, we arrived at a shop owned by a Hindu. We knew he was

Hindu because of the customary shrine to various Hindu avatars many Hindu shop owners in India display. Also, he soon told us.

His shop was particular, however, because he sold exclusively Islamic-themed items—Qur'ans, books, prayer mats, caps, jewelry with Qur'anic verses, and things of the sort. Above all, he offered a wide variety of rings engraved with the statement, "Is God not sufficient for His servant?" This, Ahmadis believe, is a revelation of God to Ahmad upon the demise of Ahmad's father. More importantly, however, it is a Qur'anic verse.

In any case, I found it fascinating that a Hindu shop owner would display his faith so openly, yet, derive business by selling exclusively Islamic materials. I decided to ask him.

"Pardon. Can you tell me about these avatars?"

"What do you want to know?" came his blunt reply.

"Whatever you can share. Who do they represent?"

"Are you Hindu?"

"No, I'm Muslim."

"Do you want to convert to the Hindu faith?"

"I mean, no, I had no plans to. I was just trying to—"

"Why would you ask such questions if you're not interested in converting?"

I paused and tried again. "I'm just trying to learn a new perspective and…" I trailed off after seeing his expression. I could tell he wasn't buying it. I certainly did not want to offend him, even accidently. Nor did I have any intention of engaging in a theological debate. Rather than try to explain the difference between interfaith and evangelism, I decided to ask him a different question.

"Are you Ahmadi Muslim?"

"No! I am Hindu!"

"But you sell only Islamic things and these rings that only Ahmadis wear. Odd, no?"

Before the shopkeeper could answer, Amir abruptly pulled me aside.

"Qasim, what in the world are you doing?"

"Nothing, just proving a point."

"Which is?"

"That interfaith doesn't mean evangelism."

"You're going to get yourself killed; stop this now."

"Killed? How? Why?"

"You know it isn't safe to discuss religion in public—"

I cut him off. "Yeah, so I've been warned about Pakistan. But we're in India. What's the danger here?"

"You never know who's listening."

I couldn't help but give Amir a confused look. As if some extremist would come to Qadian, listen in on my conversation, follow me back to Pakistan, and then try to kill me there. It was nonsense. I decided to ignore him altogether and turned my attention back to the Hindu shopkeeper.

"Sorry about that." I pushed on with the same question. "So isn't it odd that you're Hindu but only sell Islamic-themed items?"

"I'm a proud Hindu; I'll never convert to Islam!"

"Well, that's not what I'm asking but since you brought it up, why not?"

"I have found my peace in Hinduism, why should I leave?"

"Oh, beautiful, can you tell me about it?"

Something finally clicked in his mind. "You mean you want to know simply for the sake of knowing?"

"Yes, sir."

"You don't want to convert me?"

"No, sir."

"And you don't want to convert yourself?"

"No plans."

He paused again, and while carefully choosing his words, began to explain his family history, his love of the Hindu faith, and what the avatars on display meant. It was without a doubt one of the most meaningful conversations on religion I've ever had, and I didn't have to say a word more. When I left his shop, however, it was with several gifts, and most importantly, with him smiling.

But the more lasting impact of that night was Amir's attitude. Amir was about my age and was raised in Pakistan. He was born at a time when blasphemy laws were in their infancy, and raised in a time when blasphemy laws strengthened and were enforced with increasing impunity. He was an educated young man working on his master's, so ignorance wasn't a refuge. Yet, now, even in a different country, discussing his faith in public put him in an anxious panic. I attempted to reason with him that he had nothing to fear, but I may as well have been speaking ancient Latin. It made little sense to him. In his mind, any discussion of religion in public was an invitation to be killed in cold blood. I shuddered to think what a miserably oppressive reality it was.

My cousin Mubasher wasn't entirely different in perspective than Amir. This only added to my frustration and anger. This experience was

my precursor to Pakistan. Even before I set foot on Pakistani soil, the effects of Pakistan's discriminatory public policy were taking its toll. And the more I reflected, the more I realized the haunting possibility that my attitude was unfair. After all, the paranoia Amir and Mubasher expressed is something every American Ahmadi Muslim has experienced at least on some level.

In fact, American Ahmadi Muslims can pinpoint the early 1980s as the period when Pakistan began exporting extremism. Few are even aware that Pakistan's then developing culture of intolerance was already inspiring terrorism in America. This is perhaps one of Pakistan's best-kept dark secrets.

All too often, groups like the Taliban or Al-Qaeda get all the "credit" for inspiring terrorism on American soil. The fact is, however, that these groups were late to the terrorism party. Mullah Maududi, whom I mentioned earlier, inspired terrorism long before them.

In the summer of 1982, a Pakistani cleric moved to the Motor City, Detroit, Michigan. He set up shop and began growing his congregation. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, meanwhile, is one of the oldest official Muslim organizations in America. Detroit was home to one of our first chapters and in 1983, the Ahmadiyya Community USA planned on hosting their national annual Jalsa Salana in Detroit. The Pakistani cleric—upon learning of an active "Qadiani" Detroit presence—concocted a plan to thwart their efforts.

The first step was what every cowardly terrorist does—recruit others to perform his dirty work. Accordingly, this cleric recruited two American Muslims—Calvin Jones and William Cain.

One evening, the Jalsa planning committee was meeting at their Detroit mosque on Wyoming Street. A young physician, Dr. Muzaffar Ahmad, was a member of the planning committee. One of the cleric's recruits called the mosque that evening, feigning interest in learning more about the Ahmadiyya Community. Dr. Muzaffar gladly volunteered to meet with the individual. To help coordinate the meeting, the good doctor gave the caller his home address and telephone number.

Dr. Muzaffar was no ordinary person. He was a respected physician, a loving husband, and a father of two toddler boys. Those who knew him personally described his personality as soft-spoken and compassionate, and he was always eager to serve. He came from Pakistan, and witnessed the growing persecution and oppression of conscience firsthand. Thus, the opportunity to speak about his faith openly was exhilarating. It was a no-brainer to make himself available to anyone who wanted to learn.

A relationship soon formed. Dr. Muzaffar hosted Calvin Jones and William Cain at his home as honored guests. He served them dinner and treated them like family. He answered their questions and personally tended to their needs however he could. Meanwhile, in befriending and gaining Dr. Muzaffar's trust, Jones and Cain were systemically executing their extremist-cleric-inspired plan.

On August 1, 1983, they initiated their plan's final stage. Both Jones and Cain had dinner at Dr. Muzaffar's home. Upon leaving, one of them left his cap. While the act seemed innocent enough, it was deliberate. Dr. Muzaffar noticed the cap and set it aside for safekeeping, expecting to return it next time he saw his guests in person. One week later he would receive such an opportunity.

On the evening of August 8, 1983, Dr. Muzaffar received a phone call from Jones.

"*Asalaamo Alaikum*, Doctor, it's Calvin."

"*Wa alaikum asalaam*, Calvin, how are you?"

"I'm fine. I'm calling because I left my cap at your home last week. Can I come by tonight and pick it up?"

"Sure. I have it. Just ring the bell when you arrive."

Jones hung up. He and Cain made their way to Dr. Muzaffar's home. They arrived at his front door just a few short minutes later. Dr. Muzaffar's wife and children were not home at the time. Considering the horror that was about to follow, perhaps this was a blessing in disguise. The doorbell rang. Recognizing that it was likely Jones, Dr. Muzaffar grabbed the cap and made his way through the foyer to open the front door.

"*Asalaamo Alaikum*, Brother Calvin, how are you!" Dr. Muzaffar extended his hand with a smile to welcome his guest, his friend. But something just didn't seem right. Jones didn't respond, or extend his hand. Instead, he raised his arm and pointed a gun directly at Dr. Muzaffar's chest. Dr. Muzaffar had no time to react.

BOOM! The first gunshot rang through the quiet neighborhood and struck Dr. Muzaffar point-blank in the chest. He stumbled back and clutched his chest, in disbelief. Blood soaked his shirt and hands in seconds. BOOM BOOM! Two more gunshots pierced the silent night, echoing through the darkness. Dr. Muzaffar staggered back a few more steps—still not contemplating what was happening.

BOOM! He didn't have long to think, as moments later he lost consciousness and breathed his last. Dr. Muzaffar died that night as a martyr for his faith, a martyr in his home. Jones and Cain wasted no time to gloat over their accomplishment, but instead immediately fled. Their plan was only half complete.

A short while later on Wyoming Street, everyone watched in horror as a blazing fire lit up the dark sky. The fire department arrived in no time and worked heroically. Thick black smoke billowed up the street. Broken windows, melted bricks, and ash welcomed the neighbors and the mosque's congregation. Jones and Cain were nowhere to be found.

They'd be apprehended soon enough—but not by the police.

It was already pitch dark when Jones and Cain arrived at the mosque just thirty minutes earlier. The mosque—which has since been rebuilt—was then a modest two-story structure. Neither Jones nor Cain had a key and the front and back doors were locked. They climbed up the backside of the mosque and broke in through a window on the second floor. They brought plenty of gasoline with them and drenched the interior with it. A single match is all it took to start the fire—and it spread rapidly.

The smell of gasoline singed their noses. It became difficult to breathe. The fire was mature—ready to travel on its own, cause its own destruction. It no longer needed its arsonists. Jones and Cain hurried downstairs to repeat their heinous act.

But suddenly, things spiraled out of control. Neither Jones nor Cain noticed the gas-powered water heater—with a pilot light—on the first floor. As they sprayed the gasoline, the pilot light ignited the fumes and in an unexpected explosion, fire instantly engulfed the entire mosque. In a panic, Jones and Cain struggled and stumbled to find their way and escape through the mosque's backdoor. Through the intense heat and blinding light, they finally found the single door that stood between them and freedom. It was a large, heavy steel door. Things spiraled further out of control. The door wouldn't budge.

The doorknob was missing. This was not deliberate. In fact, the doorknob had been broken for years. Simply put, no one had bothered to fix it. Instead, the doorknob was kept at one side just a few feet away. People slid it in and out of the steel door whenever it needed to be used. The congregation was small enough where everyone who attended was aware of this peculiarity.

But Jones and Cain were completely unaware of this. Flames aggressively engulfed the mosque. Jones and Cain began a frightful panic, each trying to push the other out of the way to try. But the door wouldn't budge. The fire scorched their skins and the smoke burned their lungs. They desperately needed air. But the door wouldn't budge. They severely needed medical attention but the doctor that could provide it to both was no more. And the door wouldn't budge.

In desperation, Jones and Cain took their pistols and emptied their clips at the door to break it down. But still, the heavy steel door just wouldn't budge. They abandoned it and scrambled into the bathroom—snuggling up next to the same water heater that ignited the explosion—trying their damndest to escape the fire. There, the two remained caged like animals, until death apprehended them.

They died a slow, agonizing death of smoke inhalation. By the time police arrived, Jones and Cain were long gone, apprehended and arraigned before another, higher, court.

Jones and Cain were guilty of murdering a man only for his faith and burning a mosque only because of its congregants. They deprived a loving wife of her husband, innocent children of their father, and a peaceful community of their brother in faith. And without any doubt, these murderers and their terrorist acts were the consequence of the bigotry and religious discrimination that Pakistan championed as noble deeds.

Dr. Muzaffar was the first American Ahmadi Muslim murdered by extremists for his faith. Sadly, time would tell that he would not be the last. As recent as August 19, 2010, American Ahmadi Pir Habib-ur-Rehman of Pennsylvania was murdered for his faith in Pakistan.[23]

When rebuilding the Detroit mosque, many of the original bricks remained—charred and melted, as a beautiful reminder of Dr. Muzaffar's selflessness, courage, and passion to serve humanity. He was a Pakistani. Jones and Cain were black. Dr. Muzaffar expressed no hesitancy to cultural barriers, communication barriers, or social barriers. He saw two fellow human beings who wanted to learn, and lovingly opened the doors to his home and to his heart. He gave his life for his faith, but also gave the world a beautiful example of love and inspiration.

That mosque still stands on Wyoming Street. Prayers are offered regularly, and all are welcome to attend—Muslim or not. It remains as a beacon of peace in a not-so-peaceful time.

One fact about this incident that always makes me think—it involves stacks of cardboard boxes that sat on the first floor in the middle of the mosque. The mosque went up in flames, the second floor collapsed under the heat, and even the refrigerator melted into a lump of plastic and metal. Yet, by some miracle, the cardboard boxes and their contents in the middle of the mosque remained completely untouched.

While Jones, Cain, every bit of furniture, and even the mosque bricks were destroyed—the only thing that survived were dry cardboard boxes and the two thousand Qur'ans inside them. However you slice it, that's a miracle in my book.

I reflected upon this incident as I headed out with Mubasher that late afternoon. It occurred to me that if Pakistan's bigotry could inspire such vicious terrorism thousands of miles away, then how much more potent might that terrorism be within Pakistan's borders? Still, as is human nature, I tried to rationalize.

I rationalized that this incident was so long ago, and so far away from Pakistan, and so isolated, that it couldn't possibly be taken as a rule of thumb. Certainly, this had to be the exception, right? How I wish I were right.

I waited outside my aunt's home as Mubasher finished up whatever errand he had to run inside. Thoughts of Dr. Muzaffar still ran through my mind when Mubasher came out several minutes later. Wasting no time, we headed down the street to a part of Rabwah I hadn't been before—exactly opposite the direction of Tahir Heart Institute. Mubasher rode his bicycle, I ran on foot.

Today I planned an easy six-mile run. We moved at a steady pace. Hardly a half-mile passed and I was already getting stares and mockery from shop owners. My bright blue short shorts stood out like a sore thumb. The temperature had dropped some. The rain increased.

"So, where are we headed, Mubasher?"

"I thought I'd show you where we planned to have Jalsa Salana in Rabwah."

"Right, "planned to." Why don't we have them anymore again?" I thought I knew the answer but wanted to hear it from him directly.

"We're no longer allowed because of blasphemy—cows!" Mubasher slammed on his brakes.

"Cows? What?" I looked up just in time to slide to a halt. Sure enough, a herd of cows coming out of a side alley forced us to stop. "Well, I can't say I've dealt with this in the U.S." I shook my head chuckling. We maneuvered around the blasphemous cows and kept moving.

"Okay, so you were saying, blasphemy laws, right?"

"Yes, when Dictator Zia came to power, that was the end of our Jalsas here in Pakistan.[24] Still, we apply every year for a permit, and every year they deny it. Same with our young men and women youth retreats."

I am a huge advocate of youth groups. Whether it's the YMCA, YMMA, YWCA, Boys & Girls Club of America, Girl Scouts, after school activities, school sports teams, school clubs—whatever gets our kids off the streets and into productive environments, I'm all for. In America, the Ahmadiyya youth wing holds an annual youth retreat, and has done so since the 1970s. The idea that young children were banned from attending a retreat that focused on self-identity and self-confidence, community service and spirituality, and most importantly—sports and poetry—was infuriating.

In fact, in the United States, my Christian and Sunni Muslim friends also attend our youth retreats, simply to build bonds of brotherhood and camaraderie. The retreats have little, if anything, to do with evangelism or preaching. They have everything to do with becoming a stronger and more confident person, and a more productive member of society.

"What's to stop us from just holding the events on our own?"

"Are you kidding? We'd be arrested in a heartbeat. Turn here."

We turned left down an old cracked road. Mubasher sped up to get ahead. We were moving along the outside wall of the Jalsa site. I didn't, at that time, quite understand how massive the area actually was. We soon found an entrance and I followed Mubasher in, coming to a dead stop. The palace was ginormous, and hopelessly empty. I squinted into the horizon and could barely make out the other end off in the haze.

"This is insane—that this is just sitting here, empty. How many people do you figure this place can hold?"

"It's hard to say… But probably over a million. The last Jalsa we held in Pakistan was in 1983. It was at Aqsa Mosque, and there were about three hundred thousand people."

"You mean thirty thousand right."

"No, I meant three hundred thousand people. In fact, we both attended that Jalsa too."

He was right. I was but seventeen months old in December 1983. That was the last time Pakistan allowed Ahmadi Muslims to host a Jalsa. It is a personal dream of mine—and millions of other Ahmadis worldwide—to see the day when we can again host this massive peace conference.

Mubasher continued. "The most frustrating thing though, is that they've forbidden us from hosting these conferences, claiming they're a security risk."

"But that's ridiculous. We hold these Jalsas all over the world. I can't think of a single incident where something violent happened. Did something happen at our Jalsa here in Pakistan?"

"No, nothing. It's a rubbish argument. Anti-Ahmadi groups are allowed to hold their conferences, even here in Rabwah, every year. All they do is abuse the Messiah Ahmad, insult him, and incite violence against Ahmadis. But we can't hold our conferences, even in our own headquarters of Rabwah, to promote peace."

Mubasher was right again. Just as recently as September 8, 2011, after an anti-Ahmadi hate rally in Lahore, Pakistan, one of the attendees shot an Ahmadi three times, pushing him to the brink of death.[25] That such hate groups exist is not surprising in and of itself. After all, even the United States has over one thousand hate groups representing a vast number of bigoted ideologies. What's shocking in Pakistan, however, is that even when these hate groups advocate and incite violence, they have zero governmental restriction. While Ahmadi Muslims holding a public conference to promote peace are committing a crime, hate groups rallying to incite violence is protected under the guise of free speech.

"So what do we do when we need to hold a major conference?"

"We don't."

"That's it? We've just given up?"

Mubasher gave me an annoyed look. "Who says we've given up? Every year we petition the government for permission and every year they reject us. You know we're not going to do anything more than what the law allows."

"But this is such a ridiculous law. There's gotta be something we can do!"

"What would you have us do then?" Mubasher demanded to know.

I didn't have an answer and stayed quiet. Finally, Mubasher spoke again.

"Look, I'm going to head back home. You can run laps in here. Each lap is easily over a mile, probably a mile and a half. No one will say anything. Then just run back home, yeah?"

"Sure thing. Actually, I'll probably head over to Danyal's place after the run. I'll come by and pick up my stuff later."

"No problem."

With that, Mubasher headed back. I began running laps in the empty palace. On my fifth lap the endorphins began to kick in—I had already gone over eight miles. I left the Jalsa site and headed back to Danyal's. The run totaled just about ten miles.

It felt good to run again. I felt good—physically at least. But I realized that like any typical American—and I say that in the most offensive way possible—I was woefully ignorant to what so many faced in Pakistan. I figured as an American, such things would never affect me. On the contrary, Pakistan's blasphemy laws painfully affect every American, but few understand just how much.

In the coming weeks, I was finally about to find out.

10

The ~~Moral~~ Dictator

"*Those who want the government to regulate matters of the mind and spirit are like men who are so afraid of being murdered that they commit suicide.*" — President Harry Truman

Over the coming weeks I continued to reflect on everything I'd learned so far. It was during this time that I finally began to understand just how drastically oppression of conscience can transform, or rather, deform, a nation.

During these weeks I also took the opportunity to travel throughout Pakistan. I visited Lahore, particularly the Darul Zikr Mosque, which would soon become the site of one of Pakistan's worst terrorist attacks.[26] I visited Islamabad, Pakistan's capital. And I visited Rawalpindi, my city of birth.

But while my understanding of Pakistan and its increasing religious persecution grew, I knew it was yet incomplete. I turned to Danyal to help complete the picture. He and I connected well from the get-go, and I made it a point to crash at his place as often as possible.

One morning, I awoke just in time to catch Danyal as he left for his office. For security reasons I cannot provide much detail about his particular responsibilities. He's fluent in English, Urdu, Punjabi, and likewise scholarly in Arabic and Persian. He loves books as gifts. My annoyance with him stems from the fact that with every book I've ever gifted him, he's responded, "Oh, I remember reading this."

Though he is fluent in English, I conversed with him largely in Urdu.

That morning, I caught him just as he rushed past me out the door.

"Danyal bhai, mind if I join you at the office today?"

"Sure, but I'm already late, so if you want to come, you have to come now."

"No problem, let's go, I'm ready."

Danyal never took the rickshaw, at least not that I saw. He'd either walk or take his bicycle. Today was a bicycle day. Every bicycle in Pakistan has a small seat above the back wheel, installed for a second person to sit upon. It is difficult to find a bike without it. Still, I wasn't used to it because unlike sitting on a motorcycle, you sit on these bicycles with both legs on one side. This makes you think you're constantly off balance. And, as I was about to learn, you jump onto a moving bike.

"Come on, jump on, let's go." Danyal called back as he began pedaling without me.

"Hey, hold up. Slow down!" He didn't slow down but instead motioned with his arm for me to hurry up. I ran after him, timed my strides, and jumped, aiming my butt for the seat—and missed horribly, tumbling hilariously to the ground instead. I'm quite certain all of Rabwah stopped what they were doing just to point and laugh.

"Well, score one for Pakistan," I thought to myself. I stood up and dusted myself off. Danyal stopped and waited for me to catch up.

"I didn't realize you Americans were so uncoordinated."

"Yeah, well, I didn't realize you Pakistanis were so... Dang, I got nothing. Just let me sit on and then you move, okay?"

Danyal just shook his head while I sat in the back seat. And we were off; down his street and onto a main road, where we turned left. Eventually we hit the main street of Rabwah and turned right to head towards the town square. Five roads intersect into the town square, in the middle of which is a giant fountain. One whole side is the outer wall for Rabwah's largest mosque, known as Aqsa Mosque (where the Pakistan Jalsa used to be held). The other sides are comprised of either roads or retail shops.

We soon arrived at Danyal's office, at a beautiful facility on a large, well-kept campus. We parked his bike alongside probably two hundred others and made our way inside. Once inside, we walked through the main hall, up the stairs, and down another hall to his office. His office was large with a window to the outside world. Books lined the walls. His table sat at the far end, opposite the door and near the window. A computer sat on the desk, connected to the Internet at the blazing speed of 56.6 kbps. Chai is always on tap in Pakistan so I helped myself to a cup from a freshly brewed pot. Danyal, an enigma of Pakistani culture, doesn't drink chai. This time was no different.

Instead, he ran out to a meeting while I happily enjoyed my hot beverage. I had hardly finished my first cup before he was back.

"Come on, let me show you around the place."

"Actually, wait, can we sit here and chat a minute?"

"Sure, everything okay?"

"I don't know if this stuff is taboo to discuss in public so let me ask you now." I thought back to the hospital visit with Yusef. "What did Yusef mean back at the hospital when he said the police were probably 'in on the Mong massacre'?"

Danyal slowly walked over to his chair and sat down. "Well, it isn't necessarily taboo to discuss this stuff in public but it's probably safer here in private."

He paused for another moment while he gathered his thoughts, and then looked up at me.

"Yusef meant what he said. It wouldn't be the first time the police turned a blind eye to such attacks. Who knows if the police were actually involved here, but in this day and age in Pakistan, nothing surprises me anymore."

I shifted gears. "Were you old enough to remember when Mian Jee died?"

"Yes, of course. I was eight or nine. I remember quite well.

"What about 1974—when Bhutto declared us kafirs?"

"Barely—I was only four or five. Nothing I could say for sure."

Among Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, Danyal is a dying breed (no pun intended). He was born at a time when religious freedom was still protected. He was born a Muslim. But by the age of five, the government decided for him that he was a kafir, an apostate, outside the fold of Islam. While Danyal was born Muslim and later declared an apostate, according to Pakistan, I am a born apostate.

"Uncle Bashir mentioned that Bhutto opened Pandora's box when he declared us kafirs. I'm trying to understand what he meant."

"It's very simple, Qasim. You can't have a country where the government discriminates against a minority and expect that to encourage tolerance. Tolerance dies when that happens."

"So what happened after we were declared kafirs?"

"The same extremists who demanded we be declared kafirs then wanted more restrictions and more punishments."

"Why wasn't it enough that we were now 'officially' kafirs?"

"Because bigots don't just discriminate once. They try it, and when they see they can get away with it, they try to push the issue to see how far they can go."

"I see."

"Besides, these mullahs saw that declaring us kafirs did nothing to stifle our growth. In fact, it did the opposite, as now more people became interested in Islam Ahmadiyya."

"The 'forbidden fruit syndrome'?"

"Yes, precisely." Danyal leaned back in his chair. "When you censor something, suddenly everyone wants it. The mullahs saw this and lost their minds. So, they pressured Bhutto to apply harsher punishments for Ahmadis because we insisted—dared—to still call ourselves Muslim."

"Hmm, how audacious of us. So why didn't Bhutto comply? He already demonized us once to help his career. Why not again?"

"Because I don't think that deep down inside Bhutto was an evil person. Stupid, yes, but evil? I'm not so sure. I think he was just in over his head. You have to remember he wasn't the religious type anyway. I really doubt he cared much whether we were Muslim or not. He made a political move to get a few votes. And then when he realized how serious things had become, he didn't know what to do."

"Well, why not turn back and repeal the law that declared us kafirs? Why not take a stand against intolerance then?"

Danyal leaned forward. "Isn't it obvious, Qasim? You can't close Pandora's box so easily. And Bhutto certainly wasn't going to be the one to close it—that requires courage."

"Fair enough, it was his lack of courage that made him bend for the mullahs."

Danyal nodded. "And now those mullahs he tried to appease would break him."

"Break him?"

"So in the late 1970s, Pakistan had a general, General Zia-ul-Haqq."

"Yeah, Uncle Bashir mentioned him briefly."

"Right, Zia was ruthless and a hardcore Islamic fundamentalist. While Bhutto was stupid but not necessarily evil, Zia was pure evil and not necessarily stupid."

"Sounds charming."

"The mullahs loved him. And he loved their obedience to him. They supported him, and in exchange, he gave them pretty much free reign. When Bhutto wouldn't listen, he would."

"I can see where this is going."

"So General Zia soon decides he wants to become Dictator General Zia."

"What happened to the rule of law?"

"Zia was an aspiring dictator. Since when do dictators care about the rule of law?"

"Fair enough."

"Zia first accuses Bhutto of a bogus murder charge. Bhutto denies it. But it did not matter. Zia already had the military power and mullah backing."

"Then?"

"Well, that's all Zia needed. With that backing, Zia took over Pakistan in a military coup d'état and hung Bhutto."

"You mean he literally hung Bhutto?"

"Yes, and it was vicious. That, I was definitely old enough to remember. It wasn't good."

"I'm surprised there wasn't a huge public outcry."

"Would it have mattered if there was? Zia was in control now as the undisputed dictator. You Americans supported him because he agreed to fight the Russians on America's behalf. Who was going to stop him?"

"Good point. It wouldn't be the first time we supported a dictator—we were pretty good friends with Saddam Hussein back then too."

"Zia rode his popularity with mullahs to win the public opinion, promising to bring 'morality and decency' back to Pakistan. One of his first orders of business was to further ostracize Ahmadis."

"How, and why?"

"He needed a scapegoat to rally everyone against. Since Bhutto had already demonized us in 1974, and Zia knew we wouldn't resort to violence, Ahmadis were an easy target. Plus, he had an authoritarian reputation to uphold."

"Naturally. Well, why not go after Christians or Hindus, or even Shias or atheists? I mean, I'm not saying it would make it 'okay' to do. But weren't they just-as-easy targets?"

"Well, they were—rather, are still—easy targets and he'd get to them eventually. He didn't right away because they were never as organized as the Ahmadiyya Community. So they weren't a threat to mullahs in that sense. But more importantly, as I said, he did go after them. That was the whole point of Zia's blasphemy laws."

"Yes, these blasphemy laws. What is the deal with these things? Amir wouldn't let me talk to a Hindu in Qadian; Mubasher was on my case for the same thing. And yesterday I tried to talk to this Christian woman and she—"

"You did what?"

"Well, I tried to talk to this Christian woman and before I could get a word out—"

"Why in the world would you try to talk to a Christian woman in Pakistan?!" Danyal was enjoying this.

"I don't know, I mean, I talk to Christian women all the time in the States. I mean not like *all the time* all the time. It's not like I go out of my way seek out Christian women or anything, that'd actually be kinda creepy if I did that, but, you know, the usual. Like I'll talk to 'em, and usually they're pretty cool about it, well, I mean, they're cool about it as in they don't run away, so, you know, that's kind of a victory."

Danyal gave me a blank stare. I continued.

"Look, the point is that she ran away and Aunt Zakia said it's because she might think I'm a rapist and frankly, that's just not nice."

Danyal kept staring, waiting for me to finish.

Unfortunately, I continued. "Then I tried to talk to a Christian guy and he wouldn't tell me anything either. Perfectly nice guy, couple of missing teeth, crusty hands, very hospitable, but wouldn't say a word about Christian persecution."

Danyal nodded, "Sounds about right."

"So Uncle Bashir and Aunt Zakia both mentioned these blasphemy laws yesterday, and I'm trying to understand what exactly they mean here. Okay, there, done, go, educate, do your thing." I shut up, sat back, and crossed my arms.

Danyal shook his head while he continued chuckling to himself. "Qasim, this is what blasphemy laws have done to Pakistanis. Ahmadis were just the beginning. Once we were demoted to second-class citizenship, mullah extremism made sure other minority groups followed suit."

"I think I need to understand what exactly these blasphemy laws entail. Why does everyone seem so damn scared of these damn things?"

"Because there's much to be feared. These laws give mullahs and the government the undisputed power to silence anyone they want to silence, arrest anyone they want to arrest—and that's if the victim is lucky. If not, mob violence or terrorism takes over and God only knows what happens then."

"You mean like what happened in Mong."

"Exactly. So there are basically two types of blasphemy laws. One type is a specific blasphemy law against Ahmadis only."

"Well, aren't we special."

"The other is a general blasphemy law against anyone and everyone."

"Do both apply to Ahmadis?"

"Yes."

I shook my head in frustration. "Alright, let's start with the anti-Ahmadi one. What's the lowdown on this one?"

"It's simple. Declaring us kafirs wasn't enough because we still 'acted' like Muslims. We still prayed like Muslims, fasted like Muslims, dressed like Muslims, said *Asalaamo Alaikum* like Muslims, called the *Adhaan* like Muslims, read the Qur'an like Muslims, attended mosques like Muslims—"

"I get the point… So?"

"So, all this hurt the precious sentiments of mullahs who suddenly had an exclusive patent on Islam."

"Well, they didn't seriously expect us to magically transform into some new faith just because they passed a pointless constitutional amendment?"

"That was the mullah complaint! That these Ahmadis behave just like Muslims behave, so people can't tell them apart from the 'real' Muslims. Mullahs complained that Ahmadis do everything Muslims do in Pakistan, but do so with more vigor and faith. So when people join the Ahmadiyya Community, they do so because they see a 'better' Islam."

"So how does the anti-Ahmadi blasphemy stop all this nefarious Muslim-acting going on?"

"Made it illegal."

"Made what illegal?"

"Everything I just described. It was now illegal."

"Illegal like jaywalking which no one cares about or the bad kind of illegal?"

"The bad kind. Any Ahmadi 'caught' doing any of those things received a three-year prison sentence and a fine."

"For acting Muslim?"

"Yes."

"So we're not talking doing anything violent or hate speech or anything. We're talking fine and arrest for walking around, minding your own business, and behaving like a run-of-the-mill Muslim—whatever that even means."

"Yes."

"I don't think I understand this. So let's try a hypo. Let's say a cop stops me here, hypothetically of course, and I walk up to him and say, "I'm an Ahmadi Muslim, *Asalaamo Alaikum*." If I said that I'd be arrested and fined for saying *Salaam*?"

"No, actually, you'd be arrested and fined for saying 'Ahmadi Muslim' because that's blasphemy. Remember, Ahmadis aren't Muslim in this country. They're kafirs, apostates. So it's blasphemy to associate Ahmadis with Muslims. Saying '*Asalaamo Alaikum*' would only be making it worse for yourself."

Despite the serious conversation, I let out a chuckle when Danyal said, "making it worse for yourself." My mind flashed to the famous "stoning" scene in the Monty Python movie *Life of Brian*. In this scene, villagers are about to stone to death a poor old sap under charge of blasphemy. His crime? He simply stated the Lord's name—Jehovah. As the villagers are about to stone him, the man pleads with them that he's done nothing wrong. "I had a wonderful meal and I said to my wife, this was a meal fit for Jehovah!" The villagers scream in objection to his plea and the judge warns him, "You're only making it worse for yourself!" The old man, in shackles and moments from death, angrily replies, "Making it worse?! How could I possibly make it worse?!" He then breaks into dance and screams "Jehovah!" at the top of his lungs—further infuriating the villagers.[27] The humor and satire throughout the scene stems from the absurdity of killing someone for blasphemy. Yet, horrifyingly enough, that Monty Python movie is Pakistan's reality.

And the reality began to sink in as to why I was so emphatically told not to speak with anyone about my faith in Pakistan.

"Is this why we can't call the adhaan from any of our mosques?"

"Yes."

"And is this why we can't write 'mosque' on the signs for any of our mosques?"

"Yes."

"And is this why 'Muslim' is scratched off Dr. Abdus Salam's tombstone?"

"Yes."

"And why all Ahmadi literature is banned in Pakistan?"

"Yes."

"And why we can't hold Jalsa Salana any longer?"

"Yes."

Suddenly what Amir and Mubasher felt in Qadian wasn't paranoia anymore. It wasn't a phobia at all. A phobia is an irrational fear. This fear was entirely rational. Had I lived an entire lifetime under such an oppressive regime, would I have reacted the same way Amir did?

"Tell me about the general blasphemy law. What was its need if Ahmadis were now effectively silenced?"

"So the 1984 law enforces a fine and three years in prison for an Ahmadi who poses as a Muslim, right?"

"Right."

"Now with this 1986 law, Zia upped the ante. For anyone caught blaspheming Prophet Muhammad, Zia said 'off with their head.'"

"No, really, what does it say."

"It says to kill them."

"Come on, seriously, I'm trying to be serious."

"Qasim, it says death to blasphemers."

"The 1986 anti-blasphemy law?"

"Yep."

"It says death?"

"Yep, death."

"I don't believe you. There's no way it actually says that."

"But it does."

"No way, man."

"Yes way."

"Look, I know mullahs preach that garbage but there's simply no way the government of Pakistan, a sovereign nation, a democracy, for God's sake, would pass a law that gives capital punishment for blasphemy."

"Don't believe me, look it up."

"You're damn right I will."

I got up in a fury and went to Danyal's computer to log on to the Internet. I was confused and angry at the same time. The awkward silence while the computer took its sweet time logging on didn't help much either. (Anyone reading this who has never experienced dial-up Internet has no idea how annoying that wait is.) What seemed like twenty minutes passed before I finally pulled up Pakistan's blasphemy law. And my God, there it was:

> Whoever...defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine. – Section 295C[28]

"What is this, some sort of sick joke? Danyal bhai, this has got to be a joke."

"I wish it were, Qasim. But this is reality."

"And then after killing you, they fine you on top of that? What kind of jackass thought that was a good idea?"

Before Danyal could answer, an odd thought crossed my mind.

"But wait, not that it makes this law okay, but this blasphemy law would only apply to Christians, Hindus, atheists, etc., who blaspheme Prophet Muhammad, right? I mean, it sounds dumb to even have to say but obviously Ahmadis revere Prophet Muhammad. So this law doesn't really apply to us then right?"

"No, it applies to us just the same. Because we believe Ahmad is the Messiah."

"So?"

"Well, that's apparently an insult to Prophet Muhammad. Hence we're the premier blasphemers against Prophet Muhammad. But even that aside, the fact that we even 'dare' call ourselves Muslim means we're blaspheming."

I threw my hands up in disgust and stood up. Pulling my hair back, I paced about the room not really believing what I was hearing. It just didn't make sense how such a barbaric and repulsive law could be enforced in the twenty-first century—in a country that claimed to be a democracy at that. "Wait! That's it!" I thought to myself. "Pakistan's a democracy; people vote! Of course!" Speaking too soon, I proposed my bright idea to Danyal, which I was sure absolutely no one had ever thought of before, ever.

"Danyal bhai, there are millions of Ahmadis in Pakistan. And millions of Christians and Hindus and atheists and Shias, right?"

"Right, so?"

"So! Why not just vote to repeal these laws? Elect people who champion human rights, religious freedom, all that good stuff, and in a couple of years, *poof*, blasphemy laws are history." I sat back down with a smug smile, proud that I had solved all Pakistan's problems in mere seconds.

"It's not quite that simple, Qas—"

"I mean, after all, it was our voting bloc that helped Bhutto get elected, right? So, obviously, Ahmadis vote. Why stop there? Let's use the power of our voices to vote out the bigots and vote in people who understand the value of free speech. Jeez, why haven't we done this already?"

"Qasim, it's not that simple. The government already anticipated that and came up with a solution."

"What do you mean?" I got back up and walked over to grab another cup of chai.

"They found a way to ensure Ahmadis don't vote."

"What?" I burned myself a little while pouring the chai—all my attention was directed at Danyal. "How?"

"To vote, you have to register."

"Okay, so?"

"You have to register by your religion."

"Okay, that's pretty dumb but so what?"

"So, to vote as an Ahmadi, you have to register as a non-Muslim."

"Well, that's ridiculous. Of course we wouldn't declare ourselves non-Muslim. Why not just register as a Muslim and vote however we want? How would they know we're Ahmadi?"

Danyal sighed.

"What?" I walked back with my cup of chai and sat back down.

"To register to vote as a Muslim, you have to sign a form that declares Ahmad, the Messiah, to be an infidel, false prophet, and apostate from Islam."

I gave Danyal a blank stare that was part confusion, part disbelief.

"They know Ahmadis won't sign that form, and they also know that Ahmadis won't register themselves as non-Muslim. Those are the two options they give us. Well, the third is available too—don't vote."

I shook my head and muttered obscenities to myself. Danyal continued.

"And the same rules apply for *Hajj*. Pakistan actually puts your religion on your passport so we all have 'Ahmadi' on our passport. Once they see that, we can't go to *Hajj*. And if someone is born a 'real' Muslim and joins the community, Pakistan actually refuses to let them change their passport."

"Wait, so what if someone becomes Christian or atheist?"

"Nope, the official government document says 'Change of religion from ISLAM to any other religion will not be entertained.'[29] Some people who join the Ahmadiyya Community still push it through, but the official policy is to ban leaving what they think is Islam."

"My God, how is this country even in one piece anymore? How long has this been law?"

"This voting restriction was made law back in 1985 I believe."

"So no Ahmadi has been able to vote in about twenty years."

"Actually, I did once. In 2002 for a span of about six months; then President Musharraf repealed the requirement to reveal your faith when voting. But the mullahs got after him and he folded. He actually didn't even bother going through Parliament. He just issued an executive order forbidding Ahmadis from voting, unless of course, we admit we're kafirs or declare the Messiah Ahmad a kafir. So since then, only Ahmadis have to reveal their faith to vote—no one else."

I was forced to reflect on the fact that as a young adult in America, I initially balked at the voting process because I considered it useless and "feeding the machine." Americans in general don't really care to vote. We're lucky to break 55 percent in presidential elections and 40 percent in midterm elections.[30] And this is despite the massive push to get as many people to vote as possible. Despite all the pomp and flare during the 2012 presidential election, about ninety million eligible Americans didn't vote.[31] In America, I was ignoring a right protected for me, while my own cousin would've done anything to regain the right unjustly stripped from him. I felt nothing less than sheer embarrassment, and then more anger at these horrible injustices.

"So really, once the anti-Ahmadi laws were passed, it took only two years for widespread anti-blasphemy laws to pass."

"Right, and now no one was safe. You understand now why those Christians weren't willing to talk to you openly?"

I nodded silently, wondering what they must have thought of me when I asked the questions I did. The Christian woman probably did think I was going to harm her. Why wouldn't she? She'd lived her entire life in a country that treated her worse than an animal. My heart felt heavy. Danyal continued.

"My advice—don't do that again. You don't know the lay of the land here. You have no idea who it might be you're speaking with. The risk isn't worth it. All it takes is a mullah to file a police report with fake evidence and you can consider yourself as having one foot in the grave."

"Danyal this is less a democracy and more like Hitler's Germany."

"Yeah, well, Hitler did think he was doing the work of God. These mullahs think the same. They've burned Christians alive, killed Shias execution-style, raped Hindu women like it's a noble deed—and you know well what they're doing to Ahmadis."

It suddenly occurred to me on a whole new level what the American "war on terror" was really up against. This wasn't just a fight against terrorists that we had trained twenty-five years prior. And that is a fact. The CIA and Reagan administration funded and trained Al-Qaeda in the early 1980s. But that was pre-blasphemy-law era. The blasphemy laws took those *mujahideen* warriors, and gave them legitimacy in the government. This realization was frightening as it was depressing. Despite all I had learned, there was much Danyal still kept from me. In hindsight, I realized this was a calculated decision. Some matters—like his police torture or my cousin's lynching—were not easy to digest. We'd get to those soon enough though.

"How long did Zia reign as dictator?"

Danyal's expression changed to one of amazement. He stared somewhat off in the distance as he spoke. "Zia…is an interesting story. He died in office. But he didn't just die. He was literally blown to bits."

"Really? Blown to bits, huh? I'd say karma's a…well, I'd say that's karma. But considering his shady behavior in dealing with mullahs, I guess it makes sense they might've turned on him."

"It wasn't the mullahs who got to him."

"Oh? Not a Bhutto repeat? Then whose blacklist did he get on?"

Danyal looked up at me and replied with a stoic face. "God's."

11

Hiding in Plain Sight

"*Miracles do not, in fact, break the laws of nature.*" — C.S. Lewis

I sat and waited for Danyal to return. One of his colleagues had interrupted our conversation. After all, he was at work. In the two hours he'd been gone, I took a walk around his office campus to get a feel for the place. The level of discipline among the general body was impressive, and the grounds were well kept.

But it was an unexpectedly cold day. Not wanting to risk catching a cold, I headed back to Danyal's office. Considering the sizable library, finding something to read wasn't terribly difficult. I was still perusing when Danyal called out from behind me, "Find anything you like?"

"Yeah, two copies of every book I've ever gifted you. Next time I'm getting you a DVD."

Danyal laughed. "It's the thought that counts, right?"

"Yeah, whatever, I just wasted money; that thought counts for nothing."

We both sat back down by his desk. I was eager to continue the previous conversation.

"So," I began with a slight smirk, "I didn't realize God had a hit list."

"I wouldn't exactly describe it as a hit list, but Zia's downfall is something to marvel."

"Marvel?"

"Sure. A man with unquestioned power and authority, an army at his beckoning, and unlimited resources persecutes and challenges a peaceful community whose leader warns him to stop or face divine wrath. Zia doesn't listen and seals his own fate."

"Okay I'll humor your point for a minute. What exactly happened?"

"As you know, the third Khalifa died in June 1982, just about a month before your birth."

"Right, and the fourth Khalifa was elected the next day."

"Right. Vigilante justice was rapidly increasing against Ahmadis all over the country. It wasn't a pretty picture. Things were progressively getting worse, but because we still had freedom of speech, the community was still rapidly expanding."

"Yeah, Mubasher mentioned that the last few Jalsas we had, something like three hundred thousand people attended?"

"He's right. I remember those extremely well. They were incredible. People from all over the world attended. Ghana, America, England, Indonesia, you name it."

"And I imagine this was infuriating for mullahs to have to deal with."

"It was. Things finally came to a head in April 1984. There were rumors that grew stronger by the day that the government was going to pass an ordinance banning us from even acting like Muslims."

"Who led this charge? Maududi again?"

"No, Maududi was dead by now. He died in the late 1970s. And what's ironic about him is that for as much as he hated America and the West, he went for medical treatment to Buffalo, New York. I think that's actually where he died. His son lives there or something."

"Doesn't surprise me in the least. Hypocrite. So who led this charge?"

"Oh, there were several mullahs. One of the main ones was Mullah Tahir ul Qadri. He's still pretty big and popular, and ignorant and bigoted. In fact, Mullah Qadri was the leading brainchild of the blasphemy laws we just talked about. But there were several mullahs against the Ahmadiyya Community. Mullahs seem to multiply like cockroaches."

"How did the Khalifa respond?"

"Well, to Ahmadis he constantly advised us to be patient, pray, and continue our service to Pakistan as loyal citizens."

"What? That's it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I mean, no protests, grassroots efforts? Marches on the capitol or anything?"

"No, none. Look, Prophet Muhammad was persecuted for thirteen brutal years in Mecca. His companions were beaten, dragged through the sand, tied to horses that were made to run in opposite directions. They were exiled, starved, boycotted, and treated worse than

dogs. But did he ever allow any kind of public march or protest against the Meccan government?"

"Sure, but this was different."

"How so?"

"Well, for one..." I had difficulty thinking of a coherent distinction.

Danyal had a point. The early Muslims faced brutal religious persecution but did not respond in kind, or in any form of public outrage. Instead, they bore the suffering with patience. And when the suffering became unbearable, they left—migrating a month-long journey away to Medina. Some migrated to Abyssinia—modern-day Ethiopia—and sought refuge under the righteous Christian King Negus. And graciously, King Negus afforded the Muslim refugees his protection, defending them against the Meccans who came to drag them back to suffer under a brutal regime. Danyal continued.

"I remember things were extremely tense in Rabwah. No one really had any idea what was going on, but everyone had a gut feeling that it wasn't good. It was like that eerie moment of calmness right before a major storm hits."

Though I was much too young to remember or even appreciate its gravity, I was in Pakistan when all this was happening. In April 1984 I was merely twenty-one months old. Danyal continued.

"And then it suddenly hit. They announced it on April 26, 1984. It was a Thursday."

"The anti-Ahmadi law?"

"Yes, the one making it criminal for us to pose as Muslims."

"I have to imagine that the tension in Rabwah just skyrocketed."

"It did. And it didn't help that after the anti-Ahmadi law was announced, the Pakistani police showed up at Aqsa Mosque the next day."

"What for?"

"The law was passed on a Thursday. The next day was Friday. *Jummah*. The Khalifa delivered the Friday sermon every week from Aqsa Mosque."

"So they came to make sure he wouldn't, and if he did, they were ready to arrest him?"

"Right. The law specifically criminalized referring to, or addressing anyone, as Khalifa. So obviously, if the Khalifa delivered the sermon in his capacity as Khalifa, they'd consider that a criminal act."

I shook my head. "That's so pathetic." The reality of this history became suffocating. "So what'd he do? Civil disobedience?" I had visions

of the Khalifa boldly saying *Asalaamo Alaikum* and delivering his Friday sermon just to stick it to the man.

"When the Khalifa walked into Masjid he simply waved his hand in silence, and patiently sat down. Another person led the Friday sermon that day. The week prior, April 20, would end up being the final Friday sermon he would ever deliver in Pakistan."

"Why didn't they arrest the person delivering the sermon? He was technically 'breaking the law,' no?"

"Sure, but the purpose was to capture the Khalifa 'in the act' and put him away. He was our leader, that's who they wanted, not some other person."

"This is sickening, Danyal bhai. I can't even fathom how painful it must have been to be silenced like that."

"What do you mean 'must have been'? Nothing's changed since then. Those same laws are still in place; we're still silenced."

I nodded. He continued.

"Only difference now is that an entire generation's been raised in this prejudiced environment, making it all the more difficult to ever hope to repeal these bigoted laws."

"What of the Khalifa after the Friday sermon?"

"He knew he had to move quickly. Dictator Zia had issued a warrant for his immediate arrest anyway. Now the situation became extremely desperate. It was only a matter of time before police showed up and imprisoned him."

"What would they have done with him?"

Danyal sighed. "Qasim, you know what they did to Bhutto. They would've killed the Khalifa, no doubt. Either that, or thrown him in prison for life, denying him any chance of leaving or communicating with the outside world. It is nothing less than a miracle what happened."

"I imagine he had to get out of Rabwah immediately."

"Immediately! Not a second to delay. He called an emergency meeting of all the Ahmadi Muslim elders on Saturday—anyone within vicinity that could make it was called up."

"What was there to discuss? I can't imagine any other route than leaving right away."

"Sure, but it isn't an easy thing to pick up and go. The Khalifa isn't some ordinary person. He's in charge of millions of people worldwide. Also, remember, hindsight is easy. Now we look back and every decision looks obvious, inevitable. Back then, every decision seemed impossible, dangerous. A single wrong step could've proved fatal."

"What did they decide at the meeting?"

"Well, they came up with an extremely delicate plan. Undercover military and police were already convening on Rabwah to scope out the Khalifa's residence and arrest him the second he left his house on the morning of the twenty-ninth—it was a Sunday morning."

"If they were undercover, then how do you know they were there?"

"Because they're not very smart. They tried to dress up as homeless bums. But homeless bums don't have polished black leather combat boots, and don't walk upright with proper form."

"Ha. So what are you guys doing all this time? I mean the rest of the Ahmadis in Rabwah."

"None of us knew exactly what was going on, but we knew something big was about to go down. Later we found out the secrecy was deliberate for security reasons. The Khalifa didn't want to convey the plan to everyone. He wanted to ensure that no one spilled the beans because he didn't know who was listening. He didn't put it past the police to torture people for information."

"Yeah, that makes sense. But you said undercover enforcement agencies were already scoping out the place. So they probably had cars and police ready to go as soon as he left the house."

"That's exactly what happened. At first, the Khalifa thought about staying in Pakistan. After consulting with a few people, it was decided that he would have to leave. Arrangements were made immediately for him to fly out the very next day on the very next flight. Rather than booking a flight from Karachi by phone, they dispatched a messenger to go to Karachi and book a flight in person."

"They feared the phones were tapped?"

"Exactly."

"But if the police were already there, how did he plan on getting past them?"

"Well, the following morning—that Sunday, the twenty-ninth—when the Khalifa's entourage headed out to the airport, the military wasted no time. They jumped the entourage and immediately put up a blockade. There was no way to move. And because the Khalifa forbade any and all violence, there was no physical resistance."

"Hell, now what?"

"They went to the back of the car and opened it to arrest the Khalifa. This was it; there was nowhere to go. The driver remained silent. No one said a word."

I couldn't think of any possible scenario that would end up positive.

"But much to their surprise, the Khalifa did not come out of the car."

"He refused?

"Better."

"He was still at the house?"

"Better."

I racked my brain—what other option existed? I shrugged to Danyal, "I have no idea. Where was he?"

"He was gone."

"Gone?"

"Six hours earlier, he left with his wife and daughters, and two other people in a different car. So what the soldiers stopped was a decoy."

"So the whole night they were scoping out an empty house?"

Danyal smiled and nodded.

"That's brilliant!"

"The police were expecting the Khalifa's full entourage and his bodyguards. He left quietly with his family and a few close friends. No guards, no means of self-defense. He was hiding in plain sight."

"Where was he? Did he disguise himself?" The Khalifa wore a striking attire and distinct turban. You could pick him out of a crowd of tens of thousands in an instant. It is impossible to miss him.

"No, he refused to disguise himself in the slightest the entire way. He wore his regular attire—etchkin and turban—without hesitation."

"How far is it to Karachi?"

"It's a haul; about 730 miles. And the roads weren't always smooth sailing."

"So the entourage, the pomp and show, it was all just a delay tactic. All the while the Khalifa and his family slipped away without resistance?"

"Yes!"

I reflected on how Prophet Muhammad escaped Mecca just as the Meccans convened on his home to assassinate him. The prophet's cousin, Ali, disguised himself as the prophet and slept in the prophet's bed. By the time the Meccans broke in to Prophet Muhammad's home to kill him, he was already gone.

"But come on. The police can't be that dumb. They had to know if a car was leaving the house."

"Oh, they noticed. But the thing about police in Pakistan—they love money."

"Meaning?"

"So when the Khalifa left, an escort car led the way."

"Right."

"The escort car threw stacks of one hundred rupee notes out the window."

"Okay."

"Rather than pay attention to who was in the car or where it was going, they started scrambling on the ground to pick up the money."

"And these are the people running Pakistan?"

Danyal just shrugged his shoulders. I continued.

"But I'm sure word got out that he slipped through their hands, no?"

"Word did get out. The Khalifa expected it would. But that didn't change his approach—they kept marching forward to Karachi."

"What did Dictator Zia do when he found out?"

"Zia acted quickly and wrote and signed an order with his own hand. He sent that order from Pakistan's capital in Islamabad to every airport and border stop in Pakistan."

"What'd it say?"

"It put every officer at the airports and borders on notice to stop the Khalifa at all costs. He was not to fly out or leave under any circumstance."

"Well, obviously there weren't cell phones in those days. And I'm sure the Khalifa must have known that word of his exodus was spreading like wildfire among the Pakistani government and intelligence agencies."

"Right, so?"

"So I don't understand what the Khalifa expected to happen. I mean, he was driving this huge distance, without any information on what awaited him at the other end. If the Karachi airport already knew he was coming, and already had strict orders to stop him, then he was walking into a trap. What was the plan then?"

Danyal smiled. "Simple. Go to Karachi and leave the country."

"But what assurance did he have that that would be possible?"

"Call it *faith*."

I paused, skeptical but attentive. "Okay, go on."

"They literally left with whatever they could carry and nothing more. And despite the dire situation, the Khalifa remained calm and collected. It was as if he already knew the ending—like someone laid it

out before his eyes already. Meanwhile, the entire nation was on alert to catch him.

"They arrived in Karachi at about 10:30 p.m. and stopped momentarily. The plane was set to leave at 12:30 a.m. They were told to arrive at the airport at the last possible moment."

"To stay out of the limelight as much as possible?"

"Yes. The moment came to head to the airport—a car pulled up. Strangely, no police were on site to arrest the Khalifa as some feared. They proceeded through check-out and headed to security. Even now, his friend traveling with him asked him to remove his turban and assume a more quiet attire. The Khalifa calmly assured his friend to relax. Only one stop remained between him and boarding the plane—the final security stop. And that is exactly where it happened."

"What?"

"At that final security stop, the security on staff recognized and stopped him. His entire flight was grounded. He could not leave Pakistan. That was the end of the road."

"But that's so obvious. What else was going to happen? Hell, what now?"

I reflected back to the assassination attempt on the second Khalifa some thirty years prior. The fourth Khalifa was in an uncannily similar predicament now. The second Khalifa had no bodyguards, no weapons, no force. And nothing less than a miracle prevented the assassin from succeeding in his mission. Somehow the deep knife wound in his neck did not end the second Khalifa's life.

The time now came, however, when the assassin became Pakistan's ruler. Not that same assassin, but one with his vision of bigotry and hatred—Dictator Zia. And now the fourth Khalifa had no bodyguards, no weapons, no force at his beckoning. Waiting for the Khalifa in Karachi was the full force of Pakistan's enforcement power. Dictator Zia had access to all the men, guns, and handcuffs a dictator could dream of. The Khalifa had his faith, and he needed a miracle.

The moral dictator's security team held him in limbo. They'd be heroes in Zia's eyes, in the mullah's eyes. They would be the ones to take down the Qadiani Khalifa and see him thrown in prison. And now they had the Khalifa in the palms of their hands.

They compared the Khalifa's passport with the warrant as a check to ensure they had the right person. And then it happened. The warrant, the one written by Zia's own hand, the single instruction he gave to stop the Khalifa, that warrant was useless.

Not because an illegal dictator wrote an illegal warrant—which it was. Not because it violated due process of law—which it did. And not because the Khalifa was considered innocent under the new unjust anti-Ahmadi law—because he was in fact considered guilty. Instead, miracles do not, in fact, break the laws of nature—or country.

Rather, in his haste, Dictator Zia wrote to stop and arrest the fourth leader of the Ahmadiyya Community—naming him Mirza *Nasir* Ahmad. But the Khalifa's name was Mirza *Tahir* Ahmad. In other words, despite all the time, money, and effort spent to stop the Khalifa from leaving the country, Dictator Zia made the gaffe of a lifetime and listed the wrong person—one who died two years prior. This was the single communication the Dictator dictated to all posts throughout Pakistan.

The security team began to panic and worked frantically to rectify the error. It was nearing 1:00 a.m. They called Islamabad for a new warrant. No one answered. They called another number—again, no one answered. They repeatedly called number after number, government office after government office, and emergency number after emergency number—desperately trying to get someone on the phone. But it seemed that the entire government of Pakistan was sleeping that evening. The chance that no one would answer despite a nationwide effort to stop the Khalifa was probably one in a billion—otherwise known as a miracle.

The dead end suddenly gave way, and the security team was left helpless to stop the Khalifa, Mirza Tahir Ahmad. He and his family boarded the plane safely. It finally took off at 1:30 a.m. After a short layover in Holland, the Khalifa arrived in London, safe and sound on the morning of April 30, 1984.

This is a crucial event in history, not only for Ahmadi Muslims, but also for Pakistan and the world at large because it sets a crucial precedent. Throughout history, whenever a nation has forcibly exiled any person due to their peaceful religious beliefs, that nation has invited devastation upon itself. Peace cannot exist without religious freedom.

Pharaoh's vast empire fell as a consequence of his relentless religious persecution of the Jews. Hitler—likewise—earned the world's wrath and his ultimate demise for his relentless persecution of Jews and anyone who wasn't per his definition of the Aryan race. Prophet Muhammad was exiled from Mecca under threat of death—literally escaping with the clothes on his back to Medina at the eleventh hour. A decade later he returned triumphantly and peacefully to Mecca, the previously bigoted regime having fallen to pieces. By exiling the fourth Khalifa under threat of death and while enforcing the strictest forms of religious oppression, Pakistan chose the path taken by Hitler's Germany,

the Meccan's Arabia, and Pharaoh's Egypt. None of those nations survived for very long once they reached the summit of religious persecution. In them, we have a blueprint, a warning of the consequences nations face when they promote religious persecution and discrimination.

Some call it divine wrath; others call it the natural order of things. Whatever your definition, the end result is the same—religious discrimination of others ultimately results in self-annihilation. The decades since Pakistan took this massive step backwards have further cemented their path as one spiraling towards self-destruction. The fourth Khalifa no doubt conveyed these warnings to Dictator Zia, before and after his exile. It was to no avail.

When Dictator Zia discovered that the Khalifa had slipped through his fingers, he was as furious as he was helpless to fix the glaring error. The Dictator assassin, despite his worldly strength, manpower, and weapons, stood helpless against the Khalifa. Although he had every advantage, he failed, just as his predecessor failed some thirty years prior.

While both assassins were guilty of similar attempts at murder, and while both ultimately failed, one stark fact differentiated the two. The first assassin tried to kill in spite of the government. The second assassin, however, was the government. No one existed to arrest, try, and sentence him. As such, Dictator Zia considered himself invincible to accountability. While the Khalifa leaving unharmed proved, among other things, Zia's incompetence, Zia's hatred proceeded undeterred.

Although the stab wound and broken knife tip in the second Khalifa's neck did not kill him, it almost did not matter because the damage to his health was done. Likewise, while Zia did not succeed in capturing the Khalifa, it almost did not matter because the damage he sought to inflict was already done. The anti-Ahmadi laws—Zia's knife tip—were now a reality in Pakistan. Zia gave mullahs and terrorists all the legitimacy they wanted to unleash their bigotry. With their newfound power, Pakistan's mullahs wasted no time to begin persecuting religious minorities. This persecution eclipsed what Pakistan had already suffered through, what Ahmadis had suffered through, and raised it to a new level of torment and torture.

Now it was no longer just Ahmadis at risk. Painfully soon, Christians, Hindus, Shias, atheists, and any other belief minorities, would become public enemy number one. Zia was a jackal unleashed. And no one was left to hold the jackal accountable for his attempts to destroy freedom of conscience. No one, that is, except a power higher than the government itself.

And that clock was ticking.

12

The World's Strongest Dentures

"*So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.*" — 1 Samuel 17:50

Danyal and I offered our afternoon prayers, and then headed back to his place on foot. I wasn't keen on sitting on his bicycle again. We planned on leaving Danyal's office early to make the long trek to Peshawar, a major city near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. That plan would soon have to change due to my unexpected illness.

As a child, before migrating to the United States, I'd spent several years in Peshawar. This would be my first time returning in nearly twenty years. I didn't remember much about Peshawar. But perhaps it would not have mattered if I did anyway. I lived in Peshawar at a time pre-Taliban.

Yet, as I soon discovered, even during those relatively calmer days, persecution and terrorism found ways to rear its ugly head. And much of that traced back to the increasing power and influence of Dictator General Zia.

"Qasim, I can't express in words how devastating it was for Ahmadis in Pakistan when the Khalifa left. We convinced ourselves that he'd be back soon enough, perhaps a few months or at worst a year. But every day that passed, the reality began to settle in."

"That he wasn't coming back?"

Danyal nodded.

We walked past the plant nursery and back into the town square. I really don't think there's any "down time" in Rabwah streets during the day. You need to be on a constant look-out to prevent yourself from getting run over by some zealous motorcyclist, rickshaw driver, or bicyclist.

We turned right out of the town square and onto Rabwah's main street. Traffic became even heavier, as did the number of homeless individuals and beggars. Every American needs to make it a priority to spend a month, or even a week, in a Third World country to properly appreciate the opportunities we have in America. For beggars in places like Pakistan, shoes are a rarity, as are shirts for men. Food is hard to come by, and water often becomes even more difficult in 130-degree Fahrenheit summers. Things like soup kitchens are often nothing more than mythology.

No matter how hard I tried to dress in a manner that wouldn't make me stand out, I failed every time. Somehow my "Americanism" always preceded me. And if I made the mistake of making eye contact with a beggar, I was toast. Eye contact was a flashing neon sign that said, "I have money, come take it all!" My only "protection" in those circumstances came from not being alone in public. Fortunately, in this case I wasn't. They wouldn't listen to me when I told them that I had no money (which was true). I carried hardly any cash on purpose. But they would listen to a local. In this case, Danyal did nothing more than give them his "you're not getting any money" look—and yes, such a look exists—and they would back off.

The most depressing fact about beggars in Pakistan is not their poverty. If poverty alone were the issue, the remedy is simpler—feed and clothe them, and set up homeless shelters to help them get back on their feet. But the problem runs deeper than poverty and spills over into their exploitation and financial prostitution. Pimps run beggar circles, taking the vast majority—if not all—of what beggars collect in a day. It is modern-day slavery at its finest. Police look the other way because they've been bribed, and who's going to file a criminal complaint about a dead beggar? It is a vicious cycle that pains me to no end.

Still, giving them money that would end up in the hands of their pimps was hardly a solution. If I had food or water I'd gladly give that, but to give money was equivalent to perpetuating their slavery. It is never easy pushing them away. But it is necessary.

After freeing ourselves from the clan of beggars I turned to Danyal to resume our conversation.

"So with these new laws, I imagine all Ahmadi literature was now banned."

"It was—our bookstores were closed, our Qur'an translations banned, and our newspapers shut down. And even prior to these laws, the government had already taken over our schools and several properties, and have since refused to return them."

"I guess they don't call it a dictatorship for nothing."

I motioned to Danyal to stop. Despite the serious conversation, the tantalizing aroma of *jalabian* called out to me. Jalabian, if you haven't tasted them before, is basically fried sugar. It is probably the unhealthiest thing a person can consume, and also one of the most delectable. It is sugar mixed with stuff that I'm not really sure what it is and deep-fried in an old crusty pot on the side of the road over an open flame. It is a little piece of heaven on Earth.

"You're going to get ill, Qasim. Your body can't handle the street food here."

"Ah, I'll be fine, what's the worst that could happen?"

Famous last words. Later that evening we delayed our Peshawar trip. I was too busy vomiting and being rushed to the ER to recover from food poisoning. Still, it was worth it. They're that good. And besides, after eating them once, my body built up an immunity and I could eat more without throwing up even once. Score one for Qasim.

Danyal shook his head. "You're going to regret this." I shrugged it off and dove into my jalabian. He continued. "Yeah, so the Khalifa was now in London, reorganizing our international headquarters. And meanwhile—as expected—Zia only made things worse for Ahmadis in Pakistan."

"Yes, back to God's hit list. Please, do tell me more."

Danyal must have sensed the satire in my voice.

"Look, I'm not saying you have to believe it, but what followed truly is remarkable."

"So share, what followed?"

"Well, for starters, the Khalifa made certain that no Ahmadi Muslim would respond to the persecution with violence, disorder, or any form of uncivilized behavior. We were strictly forbidden from anything of the sort. And, we were told that under no circumstance do we forsake Pakistan or do anything to harm Pakistan as a nation. In fact, we were told and are still told to continue to pray for Pakistan."

Danyal's explanation reminded me how the second Khalifa forbade harming the assassin who tried to kill him. Still, I was curious to see what response to Zia the Khalifa did allow.

"But?"

"But what?"

"But what did he do as a response to the persecution?"

"Right, so in place of all those things, he issued a prayer duel."

"A what?"

"A prayer duel. Dictator Zia and his mullahs literally thought they were doing God's work. That God was on their side, right?"

"Right."

"And they were willing to put muscle and force and violence behind their so-called god to prove their point."

"Right."

"So the Khalifa called their bluff—that if you really think God is 'on your side' and approves of your bigotry and violence, then prove it. Call God to your aid and pray that He destroys Ahmadi Muslims."

"And vice versa?"

"Exactly, the Khalifa made clear that we would not respond with any worldly force. Rather, we would beseech God in prayer to either destroy us if we are false, or destroy those who are persecuting and killing innocent people only because of religious differences."

"Sounds intense—and a bit strange to say the least."

"Why does it sound strange?"

"I don't know, just doesn't seem like a measurable policy. Let's say Dictator Zia chokes on a chicken wing, or slips in the shower and breaks his neck. Is that suddenly God's wrath?"

"No, I would say not."

"Then?"

Danyal insisted. "Obviously, a certain degree of faith is required here, and that's a two-way street. If the prayer duel was issued and nothing at all happened, then maybe God didn't exist, right?"

"Sure, of course! I've seen religious leaders make predictions about the future that don't come true. Those leaders look like a total fool and lose all credibility. And frankly, such a person should lose credibility. Such nutjobs are always making predictions that don't come true. Any fool can make up random stuff."

"Exactly, which brings me to my point that the Khalifa didn't make these statements lightly. Also, if the Khalifa himself died some horrible death, then maybe God does exist and the Khalifa just brought His wrath on himself, right?"

I thought for a moment. "Sure, I guess."

Danyal continued. "So really, the only 'win' in this scenario is if the dictator suffered the consequences exactly as the Khalifa predicted, right?"

"Again, all this is hypothetical. But yeah, if that happened I guess it would prove a point on some level; sure."

"Remember the principle here. This wasn't about proving any faith right or any other faith wrong. It was about establishing the basic principle that every person must have the right to freedom of belief. That's it—nothing more, nothing else. That's all the Khalifa was asking for—religious freedom."

I nodded that I understood.

"The Khalifa invited any mullah who believed Ahmadis should be killed for their belief to accept the prayer duel. The main person this prayer duel was directed at, though, was Zia."

"Why Zia specifically? I mean, aside from his desire to arrest the Khalifa?"

"Well, this wasn't a personal vendetta. Zia topped the list because he declared from day one that his mission was to literally eradicate Ahmadi Muslims from the face of the earth."

"So Zia literally said he was going to kill Ahmadis?"

"Yes, literally. He called us a cancer and said he would eradicate Pakistan of this cancer. And he backed up his claim with force vis-à-vis the anti-Ahmadi and anti-blasphemy laws."

"What happened then?"

"Well, the time limit was one year."

"That one of them would die within one year of the challenge being issued?"

"Yes."

"When did the Khalifa issue the prayer duel challenge?"

"June 10, 1988."

"So Zia actually accepted this challenge?"

"No, he avoided it like the plague. The Khalifa knew Zia was full of hot air."

"Then?"

"The Khalifa made sure Zia understood that actions speak louder than words. That is, his repeated and relentless persecution of religious minorities—Ahmadis in particular—spoke more than any verbal acknowledgement he could ever make."

"Yeah, makes sense. So essentially the message was—stop killing innocent people or you'll face God's wrath?"

"Yes, in fact, his exact words of warning after the prayer duel were 'By the Grace of God, the Ahmadiyya Community has a Guardian, a Protector. We have a Helper. Our Helper is the Creator of the heavens and the Earth!

But I tell you [Zia] you have no Helper! I swear by God that when our Helper comes to our side, no one will be able to help you!

When God's decree obliterates you to pieces, the signs of your very existence will be wiped out. And the world will always remember you in disgust and humiliation.'[32] The Khalifa gave this clear message to Zia."

It took a moment for me to digest what Danyal was relating. The words sounded harsh. I had to remind myself that this was a warning to a dictator who not only stood by as people died, but also enabled and encouraged murdering those simply because they believed different from him. Still, my doubts lingered. "I don't know, Danyal. Still seems pretty far-fetched."

"And that's the exact attitude all of Pakistan had throughout the warnings the Khalifa issued."

"Well, what else did you expect them to think?"

"Sure, after all, it was their ignorance and bigotry that led them to persecute in the first place. They weren't about to stop simply because someone told them to stop."

"How long did this go on?"

"Zia increased his persecution. The mullahs were going wild with their newfound toys—the blasphemy laws. Several dozen Ahmadis were brutally murdered in the 1980s. But that wasn't the half of it. Many more were arrested and imprisoned."

Danyal paused for a moment to gather himself.

"Qasim, do you realize that to this day, Ahmadis sit in a putrid Pakistani prison—having been arrested on account of their faith alone?"

I paused, unsure of how to respond.

"Hundreds of homes were ransacked, shops set ablaze, mosques attacked and vandalized. And all the while, Zia sat in his ivory tower and encouraged all of it. None of the culprits were ever really brought to justice. We'd be lucky if the police even recorded our reports."

"So the persecution really did increase from the previous decade."

"The previous decade was more vigilante justice that had little legal support. Now, the dictator supported every bit of the persecution."

"I ask again then, how long did this go on?"

"So all throughout, the Khalifa is warning Zia that his time is running out, that even now if he simply stops—doesn't even need to repent or admit he was wrong—but simply stops the persecution, he'd be spared. But again, his clock was running."

"And Zia paid no attention to it?"

"None. Why would he? His political career was at an all-time high. His popularity was up, his firm grip on Pakistan was unshakable. You Americans still loved him. Why would he care about some alleged divine punishment?"

"When did Zia die?"

"I still remember it distinctly. On August 12, 1988, the Khalifa delivered a powerful address during his Friday sermon about Dictator Zia."[33]

"August 12? So this is just two months after the original warning."

"Yes."

"What'd he say?"

"That time was up. Zia's fate was sealed."

"Meaning?"

"Because Zia had ignored all the warnings, and because he had ignored every chance to stop persecuting religious minorities, that his time was up. The Khalifa made the bold claim that no matter what Zia did now, his fate was sealed."

"And this would've been well within the one-year rule. Were you guys happy?"

"Happy? About what?"

"That Zia's 'fate was sealed' or whatever?"

"No, no, not at all. This wasn't a happy matter. It was a frightening moment. And what happened a few days later still shakes me to the core."

"What happened?"

"On August 17, Dictator Zia boarded his plane with almost all of his top officials. The U.S. ambassador to Pakistan and a U.S. general were on the plane as well."

"Right."

"The plane takes off, everything is normal for the first few minutes."

"Sure."

"Now this is from eye witnesses. They said the plane started acting...funny."

"Funny how?"

"It started jolting up and down erratically. Suddenly, it lost all communication. And then, out of nowhere, it took a vertical nose dive and smashed into the ground, blowing up into oblivion!"

"Wow! Get the *fatwa* outta here!"

"It was absolute chaos! The entire nation was in shock! Ahmadis were in shock! I mean, just nine weeks earlier the Khalifa issued this challenge. He forbade any violent response to Zia, and allowed only personal prayer for Zia to come to his senses."

"So," I jumped in, "Zia was literally obliterated to pieces!"

"That's literally what the headlines read the next day. All they found of Zia were his dentures—that's all they had to bury in his tomb."

I composed myself. "But come on, world leaders are assassinated all the time. How do you know some secret government organization didn't do this?"

"Oh, the conspiracy theories flew, and still fly. Some blame the CIA, others blame Russia, some blame Bhutto's family that they were getting revenge, some blame Mossad."

"What did the official reports say?"

"They all conflicted. Some blamed mechanical error, others blamed pilot error, and still others said it was sabotage."

"No single consensus?"

"Not even to this day. It's just a mysterious plane crash and nothing else. Even the *New York Times* reported that no official consensus exists."[34]

"What effect did it have on Pakistanis?"

"Not enough. This wasn't about to convince the mullahs and bigoted politicians. This was just another reason to hate Ahmadis and spread conspiracy theories that we somehow took down Zia's plane."

We'd nearly arrived back to Danyal's place. Still unsure if I was fully convinced, I conceded that Danyal was right about one thing—the story was remarkable.

Zia's death had ushered in a new era for Pakistan. Before, anti-blasphemy laws were his project, his ambition. But as a new regime came into power, it became clear that these laws became a political football.

It wasn't long before the "daughter of the East," Benazir Bhutto, came to power. Benazir was the daughter of the late Bhutto—whom Zia hung when coming into power. When asked if she would repeal the constitutional amendment that declared Ahmadis kafirs, she flat out refused. In reality, Benazir only furthered Dictator Zia's agenda. And it was an agenda she would come to regret in the future—as the very terrorists she endorsed after Zia's death caused her death.

As for now, I already began to feel the jalabian's not-so-kosher effects. As we arrived at Danyal's place, I laid down to rest it off. But it wasn't long before I was vomiting and riding another rickshaw to the hospital to get checked out. Our Peshawar trip would have to wait just a bit—which was a good thing. While I was entirely oblivious to it then, considering what I was in store for, I'd need all the strength I could get.

13

Shia Suffering & Horrors Hindus Face

"*Look for the man who's beaten. Feed him from my food, irrigate him from my water…*" — Imam Ali
"*Do not get angry or harm any living creature, but be compassionate and gentle; show good will to all.*" – Lord Krishna

I slept most of the next day, not remembering much of the night before. They'd injected me with I don't know how many drugs. But whatever they did, it worked. I rolled out of bed and stumbled into the restroom, a bit queasy, but a world better. Danyal had left for work. I called him to apologize for the hospital rush. He graciously laughed it off. We made a plan to leave early the following morning. For now it was just me and my Aunt Razia at home.

She was then in her mid-sixties, and is today well into her seventies. Like her older brother, Bashir, she too had seen Pakistan's beautiful birth, stumble, and decline. Unlike most mothers, however, she'd also sat helpless as police brutally tortured her son. When I asked her about it, she declined discussing it—and not because she didn't want to. Although well over a decade had passed since Danyal's torture, he refused to talk about it. My aunt simply didn't have much to tell me.

Still feeling queasy from the food poisoning, I hung around the house most of the day and decided to crash early for the night. The following morning I woke to the sound of the adhaan. The queasiness had fortunately subsided and I felt my strength returning. Once again, I rolled out of bed and stumbled into the restroom. As I exited, I saw Danyal, bags packed, fully clothed, ready to roll. He caught me by surprise.

"What, already?"

"Yes!" he cheerfully replied. "How ya feeling? Good! Let's go."

"Well, can I pray and get some breakfast first?"

"Here, eat." He handed me a plastic bag with three hard-boiled eggs. I stared at them blankly.

"You eat them."

"Yes, I know, but this is not gonna to be enough, man."

"Too bad, eat, pray, let's roll—that's the plan, get moving." He turned and headed out the back door. "I'm calling a rickshaw to take us to the bus station, you got five minutes, and..." I didn't catch the rest, as he was already outside.

Realizing I didn't have much of a choice I put the bag of eggs in my bag and offered *Fajr* prayer. I'd hardly finished when Danyal marched back in empty handed. "Come on lets go lets go! Luggage is loaded, rickshaw guy is waiting!"

"What's the rush, man? I haven't even packed!" I grabbed my duffle bag and threw in whatever clean clothes I could grab, my camcorder, and toiletries. Danyal didn't bother responding but just motioned to hurry as he headed back out.

It was still dark when we left. Outside, the rickshaw's gentle rumble echoed off the neighbors' walls. Most every house had a light on as people finished offering their morning prayers. We passed by those walking back from various mosques, having just done the same.

After going through several side streets we arrived at Rabwah's main road and turned left to head towards the Heavenly Graveyard. A few moments later, we arrived. I'd eaten my eggs but was still wholly hungry and half asleep.

"Now what? Where's the bus?"

"Oh, it'll be here in about thirty minutes or so."

"Dude, what? Thirty minutes! You were making me rush like Judgment Day was around the corner!"

"Who knows, maybe it is!"

"That's not the point!"

To add insult to injury, the bus took a full forty-five minutes to arrive. We boarded. Early rays of light finally began cracking the horizon. Traveling in Pakistan is never really safe. Whether you're a native or a foreigner, things can go horribly wrong if you're not extra careful—and sometimes even then. Despite being an experienced traveler, Danyal's brother Hafiz Ahmad was drugged, robbed, and left stranded without any identification on a trip back from Thailand.

It was a bumpy and uncomfortable bus ride. Roads in Pakistan are rarely smooth and this road was no exception. As we hit a major pothole—either that or a cow—the entire bus lurched and luggage fell from the upper racks.

I held my bag tight in my lap. But that did me no favors as four of us were smashed into a seat made for three at the back of the bus. Danyal sat next to me, equally pressed. Fortunately for him, he sat in the window seat. I sat next to someone with killer body odor and morning breath from hell.

"Danyal bhai."

"Yeah?"

"Wanna switch seats with me?"

"Why?"

"No reason, just...wanted to enjoy the scenery."

Danyal knew I was fibbing. "Well, enjoy it from over there. I can already smell the guy next to you, the window's mine." Danyal smiled.

"Oh, come on, I'm totally getting screwed!" He didn't bite.

Something outside the window caught my eye. "What's with that group wearing all black clothing?" I pointed to a fairly large group of travelers outside, walking on foot.

"What do you mean 'what's with them'?"

"No, I mean, is there a reason they're dressed in that attire?"

"Yes, they're Shia Muslims."

"Ah, I see."

There's no easy way to say it. The number of Shia Muslims killed in Pakistan annually is approaching genocidal proportions. In the interest of full disclosure, some Shia Muslims do engage in violence, and that isn't helping their cause. But that aside, the number of innocent civilians murdered in cold blood—while Pakistan looks the other way—is horrifying and inexcusable.

Shias comprise roughly 20 percent of Pakistan's 190-million population. They are not a monolithic group by any means. One particular subset of Shia Muslims, known as the Hazara, have suffered more than most. Sunni terrorist organizations particularly target them with terrorism, intimidation, boycott, and ongoing harassment.

For example, on August 25, 2012, about two dozen Hazara Shias were pulled from a bus and murdered execution-style.[35] On January 10, 2013, over one hundred Shias in Quetta, Pakistan, were murdered in cold blood as six terrorist attacks rocked the region. Over 260 were injured. Human Rights Watch reported,

> The Pakistani government's persistent failure to protect the minority Shia Muslim community in Pakistan from sectarian attacks by Sunni [Deobandi] militant groups is reprehensible and amounts to complicity in the barbaric slaughter of Pakistani citizens. The government should immediately hold accountable those responsible for ordering and participating in deadly attacks targeting the Shia across Pakistan and particularly the Hazara Shia in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province.[36]

Most depressingly, the Pakistani government refuses to take any substantive action. Meanwhile, Dictator Zia's anti-blasphemy laws enjoy continued protection. Despite generation after generation of Pakistani youth being raised under the belief that "might is right," Pakistan's leaders refuse to recognize the horrific injustices these laws cause. And blasphemy laws are but one of the cancers afflicting Pakistan.

When police and government agencies are aware of impending terrorist attacks—but do nothing to stop them—what hope do minority Pakistanis like the Hazara Shias have? Perhaps this desperation caused the Hazara Shias of Quetta to take extreme measures as they refused to bury their dead. Finally, after several days of protests and sit-ins, Pakistan's prime minister fired the provincial minister for failing to provide adequate protection to the region's Shia Muslims. Only then were the Shia martyrs laid to rest.

Yet the persecution and murder continues. What started with passive persecution of Ahmadi Muslims has now engulfed Shia Muslims as well. Since 1999 in particular, terrorist groups have made it a promise to make life hell for Shia Muslims. Pulling Shias off the bus for their mass execution has become a common news story. It begs the question: Why hasn't the government done anything to prevent such atrocities?

If a real answer existed, perhaps this book wouldn't need to.

While writing this book I received an email from an old high school friend—let's call him Jameel. And when I say "old friend," I mean someone I didn't particularly get along with back then. It's funny how age changes us, and how tragedy brings us together. Death can make life all the more meaningful.

He wrote, "Qasim, how are you doing? Been a long time! I know we have had our differences in the past but I have had a tragic, sad incident happen to my loved ones in Pakistan. The Dawoodi Bhora community, my community, has been a target of senseless murders and bombings. My cousin Mustafa was just gunned down at his shop in Pakistan."

My heart sank. I clenched my teeth & forced myself to read on.

"It hits me hard that I need to be proactive and do what I can to help the cause! Our past differences aside, I stand with you in your fight to help resolve all this nonsense killing of anyone for any reason! Don't know how I can help but I am asking to know how I can contribute!"

I received his email early in the morning; around 7:00 a.m. I'd just finished *Fajr* prayer a short while earlier and checked for any messages before leaving for work. Before I could reply, he'd sent a second, shorter email. It was also heart-wrenching, but comforting at the same time.

"It's things like this that keep me from practicing being a Muslim. But deep down inside, I know religion of all kinds are being manipulated to control and move people to do wrong."

He was right and he made me reflect. Such horrific acts have the potential to drive a person from his or her faith. These atrocities are not easy to overcome or absorb. How many did I know that are no longer Catholic because of the sex-abuse cases? How many did I know that are no longer Muslim because of terrorism done in the name of Islam? But that said, I was grateful to see him differentiate between religion, and religious manipulation. He recognized that people abuse religion for personal gain. And that abuse of religion is a far cry from religion justifying terrorism. Indeed, terrorism has no religion.

I replied, "*Asalaamo Alaikum*, Jameel. I've been well. It has been a long time for sure. I'm not sure I even remember what differences we had but I definitely take responsibility for it. I'm terribly sorry about your loss. It pains me to the core. No one should have to go through that."

That said, I wanted to invite him to join the cause to protect freedom of conscience.

"How would you feel about working with me to bring awareness to Shia persecution in Pakistan? How'd you feel about sharing Mustafa's story with the world? We can use that awareness to help stop it."

I added, "Your faith, your practice as a Muslim, is something that belongs to you and only you. Don't let anyone feel they have the right to judge you on that. Practicing a faith is something only you can do."

Jameel soon responded, "I would love to do what I can! But I myself have been so turned off by the news that it took the passing of my cousin to get involved again. I want to understand who and what caused these attacks. Frankly, I am uneducated in that but deep down want to believe our people can be safe in their own land. But, it has been proven time and time again to be untrue."

Jameel's last statement struck to the heart of the issue. How could a people not be safe in their very own homeland? No sooner did the thought enter my mind, but so did the reality of world history. Jesus Christ declares in Matthew 13:57, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." Native Americans were brutally murdered not in a foreign land, but in their own. Australian Aborigines faced mass genocide in Australia, not elsewhere. And how can we ignore the transatlantic slave trade, which destroyed and depleted millions of lives in Africa by taking them elsewhere?

As such, what was happening to Ahmadis, and now Shias, was just a reflection of how corrupt people have always acted throughout history. I urged Jameel to tell me more about his cousin and how he died.

"Some say it's a political party or the Takfiri group (i.e., those who declare others to be infidels). Little do I care about *who* but more so *why* and *how* I can help my family and the innocent lives across the world in the same position."

Jameel was also kind enough to add, "And bro, it's not your position to take responsibility for our past. We were young and each had our stubbornness to add to the situation, but it's the past..."

It felt reassuring to see a friendship sprout after over a decade of stagnation. Jameel continued to relate Mustafa's story of martyrdom. "It happened Tuesday [November 6, 2012]. He came down from his home after prayer, I believe around Maghrib time [right after sunset]. He was shot in the head at his shop minutes later. All the papers say the attacks are growing in numbers because the month of *Muharram* is approaching."

As background, *Muharram* is a particularly holy month for Shia Muslims because it marks the martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Imam Hussain. Shias believe Prophet Muhammad appointed Ali as his successor, and some therefore believe leadership next rested with Ali's progeny—Imam Hussain. Therefore they mark Imam Hussain's martyrdom with increased prayer and grieving. Terrorists, instead, use the month as an excuse to increase their acts of violence and terror against Shia Muslims. What Jameel said next took me back to the bus ride with Danyal—when I noticed the "particularly dressed" travelers who turned out to be Shia Muslims.

"In Pakistan, they wear particular caps and have beards. I feel that they stick out as easy targets."

In many ways the same question I asked Danyal about his choice to be a missionary in Pakistan was applicable here. Why live a public life of religious practice? Why not just live privately and live to see another day?

I was understanding more and more that true freedom of conscience cannot be called "true freedom" if we must censor ourselves to "look right," or dress like "the right kind of Muslim."

Jameel continued, "But, as you may know, most of those areas have a high population of Shias. Everyone wears religious garments and that makes it very easy to pick someone out. The shooters didn't ask for money and didn't say a word. They had a silencer and just went through the market and shot four people. Two were injured badly and two died, including Mustafa. It was such a senseless attack."

I thought about how many times I cringed at reading "senseless attack." I empathized with Jameel—his cousin Mustafa Jamali now rested peacefully. His life was cut short only because of his faith. Jameel could be anyone. In this case, he's a young man living near Chicago. He could be your neighbor, your best friend, your kid's schoolteacher. His cousin Mustafa might've been someone none of us would ever meet—but if we are our brothers' keepers, then speaking up with Jameel for his cousin's murder must be our unwavering responsibility.

Horrors Hindus Face

The ride to Peshawar would require numerous connections. It hadn't been but an hour before we stopped at our first stop—though we'd be taking the same bus to the next stop.

As we stepped off the bus I looked over to notice a police officer standing outside a car. He was laughing; the driver was angry. I nudged Danyal, "What's going on there?"

Danyal looked over and shook his head. "Just watch."

Another few moments passed. The officer kept shaking his head and smiling while the driver continued to get angry. The officer tapped his watch, as if he was short on time. Finally, the driver reached into his pocket and pulled out a wad of cash. The officer counted it, pocketed it, and stuck his hand out for more.

"He's demanding a bribe?!" I looked over at Danyal, who nodded in affirmation.

"I'm shocked he's being so open and reckless about it. I mean, if you're gonna take a bribe, at least be discreet, right?"

"Not if you're the one enforcing the law. Who's going to hold him accountable?"

The driver, furious, pulled out some more bills, slapped it into the officer's beggar-like hand, and drove off while yelling profanities. The officer laughed, pocketed the money, and moved on to his next victim.

I'm sure there are honest police officers in Pakistan. There have to be, after all. Right? But I found myself having more and more difficulty convincing myself of such. To date, my interactions with the police in Pakistan involved having a gun drawn on me and witnessing a bribe in broad daylight.

My stomach was already rumbling and grumbling. Convincing myself that I'd built up an immunity from the street shop food I ate a few days prior, I walked up to another shop to grab a bite.

"You sure you want to risk that again, Qasim?" Danyal called out from behind me. He was half laughing.

"Hey, I'm starving, and I'm not waiting until we get to Peshawar to eat. Do you want anything?"

Danyal shook his head no. I ordered some samosas and a Shezan mango juice drink and headed back to the bus. Shezan is an extremely popular drink in Pakistan. It is also a major Ahmadi-owned company. Thus, as one might predict, boycotts against Ahmadi Muslims invariably include a boycott of Shezan products. But the irony here is as delicious as the drink itself. Despite the best efforts of the most influential Pakistani clerics, we've learned that Pakistan's love for Shezan exceeds their hate for Ahmadi Muslims. A boycott against Shezan simply doesn't last very long because the boycotters ultimately give in to sweet juicy temptation. If nothing else, it demonstrates that these clerics are so fickle in their alleged life's purpose to "protect Islam" from the 'wrong' kind of Muslims, that a sugary drink undermines their best efforts.

In other instances, clerics have caused riots simply because someone drank their water. In August 2010, a riot broke out after a Hindu child drank water from an allegedly "Muslim only" cooler. Claiming that the Hindu child had somehow contaminated or made the water *na pak* (impure), the clerics launched a massive riot.[37]

And this is but one of the horrors Hindus face in Pakistan. The U.S. State Department reports that twenty-three Hindu children were kidnapped between January 2008 and December 2010.[38] Hindu and Christian women, including minors, are particularly vulnerable to rape and forced conversion to Islam. Some estimates record that up to twenty-five Hindu women in Pakistan are forcibly converted to Islam every month.[39] How one can be "forcibly converted" is beyond me, but leave it to Pakistan's ignorant clerics to advance bigotry to new levels of horror.

When I understand the reality of these horrors, the reactions of that like the Christian woman in Rabwah who literally ran away from me make a lot more sense. How depressing when Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah—who, by the way, was a Shia Muslim—declared,

> In any case Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic State to be ruled by priests with a divine mission. We have many non-Muslims—Hindus, Christians, and Parsis—but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan.[40]

Somehow, what Pakistan has turned into today is the antithesis of its founder's vision.

Roughly four million Hindus live in Pakistan. They are the descendents of patriotic Pakistanis who chose to remain in Pakistan after the partition with India in 1947. Some historians even argue that a Pakistani Hindu authored Pakistan's original national anthem. Hindus in Pakistan today are the descendents of those who believed they would enjoy the same rights as anyone, and would play their rightful part in Pakistani affairs. Time, however, has told a different story, and Hindu persecution increases every year in Pakistan.

As a result, thousands of Hindu families have finally given up living in their ancestral homes and are instead migrating to India. These are yet another people of Pakistan, unsafe in their own land. In 2012, extremists in the Sindh region of Pakistan began a street campaign, publicly announcing and encouraging the Muslim majority to "pick and choose" which Hindu girls they would like to be kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam.[41]

Police, meanwhile, have been complacent or non-existent. Hindu men generally aren't allowed in police forces, and while some certainly exist, the status quo remains the good old boys' club.

When attempting to worship, Hindus face similar obstacles of violence and intimidation. In December 2012, a Hindu temple in Karachi was razed to the ground. The police, meanwhile, were not only present, but assisted those razing the temple.[42] And this incident is not isolated.

Forced conversions, razed temples, denied jobs, and riots for drinking segregated water—this is the reality for all too many Hindus in Pakistan. And as long as Pakistanis and the world remain ignorant to these horrific atrocities, their plight, along with the horrors that all Pakistan's minorities face, will only increase.

I boarded the bus and took my seat, stomach full and content, but mind disturbed from the bribe I'd witnessed. But the trip was just beginning. My conversation with Danyal soon turned to one of the most horrifying events I've ever heard of. It probably would've been better had I kept an empty stomach for this one.

14

The Sixth Night

"*Courage is not having the strength to go on; it is going on when you don't have the strength.*" — President Theodore Roosevelt

Having begun to understand the level of discrimination Shias and Hindus faced, my thoughts turned to another important matter. I wanted to ask Danyal a burning question, but was hesitant. I didn't know how he would respond. He'd never talked about it with anyone at length, not even his siblings, parents, or wife. But I had to know and—as we've already established—I had quite the big mouth. It was inevitable that I muster up the courage to ask him.

"Danyal bhai?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm just gonna say this so, don't freak out on me or anything but…" I paused.

"Go on."

"I want to know about your torture." And there it was, hanging out there like the big awkward request it was.

Danyal paused, contemplating on how to respond. I was damn near certain he'd brush me off or perhaps even get upset that I asked. But for some reason that I still don't understand even today, he turned to me and soberly said the one thing that would catch me completely off guard.

"Okay. What do you want to know?"

I did a double take. "What? Really? You're willing to talk about it?"

"Well, why would you ask me if you didn't think I was?"

"I don't know, I guess I just figured it was worth a shot in case you were."

"Then you better ask me quickly before I change my mind."

"Well, then tell me everything. The whole thing, start to finish."

Danyal took a deep breath. He didn't need to remind me that this was something he'd never spoken of. The man next to me shifted positions and coughed. I turned my head away and could feel his open-mouthed cough on my neck. The phlegm felt disgusting. I wiped my neck clean and thought about turning to chew him out but realized it would do me no good. Like it or not, I was stuck next to him for the next few hours. Danyal looked out the window for a moment. I remained silent. He took another deep breath and took me back to 1997.

The Arrest

It was hot that evening. One of the hottest evenings of that summer. Danyal was appointed to Lahore as a missionary in what was one of his first major assignments. He came home exhausted one late afternoon, after a long day at the office. Having been up since about 4:00 a.m., Danyal wanted nothing more than to have dinner, offer prayers, and crawl into bed for a decent night's sleep.

He and his wife and daughter lived in a place called Baghbanpura in Lahore. It was a modest, simple home. They now have two children.

As he entered the street to his house Danyal noticed a myriad of police officers swarming the area. He had no idea why they were there. After checking with a few neighors he discovered they too were oblivious. Everyone stood outside their homes, each curious to solve the mystery.

As Danyal neared his home he realized that it was the giant police force's epicenter. They were waiting. And as Danyal would soon discover, they were waiting for him. Two officers stood guard at his front door—uniformed, fully armed, and ready for only God knew what.

Danyal slowed on his bicycle and dismounted, walking the final few steps to his front door. No sooner did he pull up than they began questioning him.

"Who are you? What are you doing? Why are you here?"

Had Danyal known what was coming, he might have apologized for the mistake and left. He would have ran right then and there. But there was no way he could've known.

And then there was his family. Even if Danyal could have known what was coming, he could not possibly leave his family to police abuse and manipulation. Unsure of how to proceed, Danyal calmly and cautiously answered their questions.

"My name is Danyal. I'm coming home from work. I live here."

Much to Danyal's surprise, they were surprised. They were astonished Danyal arrived on a bike, that he lived there, that he was—in their eyes—giving himself up so easily.

They were expecting a complex arrest, hence the hundreds of armed police officers and a road block fit to stop a tank. Yet, the person they sought silently and unassumingly arrived on a bicycle.

Danyal, still astonished, entered his home and saw yet more officers. He saw his wife in a panic and walked up to her. She was holding their infant child.

"Are you okay, Hannah?"

She was not okay. "No, I am not okay! What are these police doing here?! What's happening?!"

"I'm not sure, don't worry, everything will be fine." Danyal wasn't sure he even believed himself.

Danyal's daughter was only six months old. His wife's uncle was also present. The lead detective angrily interrogated them. When he saw Danyal, he suddenly became bewildered.

"Who the hell are you?"

"I'm Danyal."

"What?!"

Danyal was about to speak up when officers from outside confirmed that this was in fact the Danyal they sought. Without saying another word he ordered Danyal be cuffed.

Danyal protested, "Why are you arresting me? What is the charge?!"

The police refused to acknowledge him. God only knew what sort of lies the detective fabricated to call such a large contingency of police officers for the arrest. And that's when they took him away.

He was a young man—only twenty-nine. A new father, married hardly two years. A new missionary on his first major assignment to a major city in Pakistan. This unjust arrest wasn't something he'd prepared for. Perhaps he should have. He had no idea why they were dragging him away against his will. And he had no idea where they were taking him.

His wife tried to protest but the police easily pushed her back. Danyal reassured her, "Stop, Hannah. Stop. Don't worry, I promise I'll be back soon. I'll be back in a few hours once this is sorted. Don't worry." She calmed down some but remained apprehensive. Something didn't feel right. She felt helpless.

As the detective dragged Danyal outside and down the street, the entire police force began cheering and congratulating one another. They continued their rejoicing as they followed behind the lead detective and Danyal.

Danyal continued his protest. "Where are you taking me? What are you charging me with? Answer me!"

But the detective remained silent. No one would answer. They spoke of random matters amongst one another, but refused to acknowledge Danyal even existed—though a few minutes prior they were astonished to see him.

Danyal was oblivious to what was coming next, or where he was going, or why he was going. For now, Danyal was being held against his will, without any charge. He would later discover that they first took him to a police station at a place called Gujar Singh. Then, that same night, they took him to the police center at Yateem Khana. These are places in various parts of Lahore.

But for now, they kept Danyal in the dark. Considering what they planned for him once he got there, it is no wonder they remained silent.

The First Night

The detective threw Danyal in a prison cell and left without saying a word. Danyal was already exhausted from the long day. And now the whole night passed in agony. He couldn't for the life of him figure out what crime he'd committed. What sort of crime could require such a massive operation to arrest a single person?

After a few minutes, Danyal called out to the guard. "This is insane. Let me at least call my wife to tell her I'm okay. She has no idea what's going on."

The officer on duty laughed at him and ignored his plea. Danyal then asked for a lawyer—same response. After trying a few more attempts to get basic legal rights, Danyal quickly realized it was futile. It was one of the most difficult nights of his life. He'd never felt more alone.

He sat on the ground in an empty cell. No chair, no bed, nothing. It was a filthy and disgusting place. The smell was nauseating. It was dark and horrendously hot. It felt like a sauna. And the time ticked by incredibly slowly.

Danyal kept praying and reflecting, and praying some more. Thoughts of Prophet Joseph began forming in the back of his mind. This thought was appropriate enough because Danyal's trial was far from over. In the morning, the lead detective, Mr. Irshad Gulab, called for Danyal. He was already sleep-deprived and exhausted beyond belief. The guards couldn't have cared less, and dragged Danyal into the detective's office.

"Do you know why we arrested you?"

"No," Danyal replied.

"Are you sure?!"

"My hands are clean. I've done nothing wrong. What you're doing is illegal."

The detective remained quiet. After a few minutes, another officer handed him a folder. He took his time reading it and looked up at Danyal again.

"Are you a Qadiani missionary?"

"I am an Ahmadi missionary, yes."

"Tell me, Qadiani, what is your duty? Your responsibility?"

"My duty is to provide moral and spiritual training—"

"Who gives you orders?!"

"Well, my orders come from—"

"How many Qadianis reside in your area?! How do you contact them?! What kind of activities happen in the so-called Darul Zikr?!"

He wouldn't let Danyal finish an answer before jumping to the next question. Danyal instead stopped trying to answer and allowed the detective to finish his angry bigoted tirade.

It is important to note the background to Darul Zikr. Darul Zikr is Arabic for "House of Remembrance." Because Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan are forbidden from calling their mosques "mosques," their "houses of worship" are given other names that reflect spirituality and righteousness. Here, the "Zikr," or "Remembrance," referred to the remembrance of God, a concept that Detective Gulab found offensive. That is, offensive that Ahmadis would "dare" remember God. More importantly, Darul Zikr is one of Lahore's largest Ahmadi Muslim mosques.

Still, Detective Gulab continued his tirade. "Who is in charge at Darul Zikr? And tell me all the names of your siblings and of your parents!"

The questions came nonstop. Most made little sense. Gulab continued to ask several similar questions about every aspect of Danyal's life. Danyal, meanwhile, was left in shock with their awareness of his activities. How could they know so much about him, yet remain unable to recognize him when he walked home the day before? In the week prior, Danyal had conducted several question-and-answer sessions on Islam at the mosque. Detective Gulab related each and every detail of those sessions.

"We know you have been conducting sessions to convert innocent Muslims from Islam to Qadianism. You damn well know that that is a crime!"

The police had been spying on Danyal. Whether this was legal or not was irrelevant. Nothing's illegal if done against Ahmadis. After all, even if it were illegal, who would hold the police accountable?

And it would've been nearly impossible for Danyal to know he was being spied upon. There are tens of thousands of Ahmadis in Lahore, and millions in Pakistan. If a new face showed up suddenly—as they often do—Danyal couldn't possibly sit and inquire about the background of every single person.

Danyal tried desperately to explain himself to Detective Gulab but the detective wasn't looking to listen. He'd cut Danyal off and demand he give a "real answer." Danyal answered as best he could but Gulab yet continued.

"Upon whose orders do you preach and convert people to Qadianism? What gives you this right? What are your connections? How much money do Qadianis give you? What benefits do you get?"

"I am being honest! I have dedicated my life to the service of Islam and humanity."

"LIAR! You disgusting liar! We know you are being paid millions of dollars! We know you are a Qadiani ring leader!"

The fiasco continued for several hours. When they finally saw Danyal wasn't going to give them the answers they wanted to hear, their aggression increased.

The lead detective leaned in close to Danyal and looked at him dead in the eye.

"Tell us everything you know, otherwise we will torture you in such a manner that you will scream the truth and beg for mercy."

It sent a chill down Danyal's spine but he remained resolute and tried not to show that the threats affected him. Still, random thoughts entered Danyal's mind. "Why not just make up some story and tell them to get thim off my back?"

But just as suddenly as those thoughts came, they were discarded. Even in the face of total uncertainty, Danyal knew his salvation did not rest in lying. He also knew that they did not just want to know about him, but instead, about countless other people. Danyal's arrest was just the beginning. They sought to extract names from him to arrest and torture others. Danyal couldn't risk saying a word for any reason. Once the detective and police saw Danyal wouldn't crack so easily, the real torture began.

The Second Night

The day dragged on. Danyal was already exhausted as it was, having been awake a day and a half now. Detective Gulab called in two officers who led Danyal back to his tiny prison cell with one door and no windows. Two men were appointed to stand on guard the entire time.

Danyal thought that was that, but that was anything but that. Once back in his cell, Detective Gulab barked an order to his officers.

"Until he's willing to talk, do not let this Qadiani scum sleep for a second. Understand?!"

"Yes, sir!" The guards responded.

Danyal asked again to call his family. They had no idea where he was. No idea what allegations were being levied against him. No idea which government agency had arrested him. The guards refused.

Danyal's siblings and family suffered through their own mental anguish. Theirs was nothing short of torture itself. Neighbors and friends paid visits of condolences to Danyal's mother. The atmosphere was one of having lost a loved one to death. Indeed, no one could ignore the reality that Danyal might not return.

Danyal knew the torture was not a bluff and made a firm promise accordingly. That no matter how difficult, he would resist whatever they threw at him. No sooner did Danyal make this promise than the guards handed Danyal a piece of paper and pen and demanded that he write. From their spying they already knew everything relevant about him. Only the names of other Ahmadi Muslims would satiate their bloodlust. He refused.

Thus began the sleep torture. Danyal didn't get a bed. And as disgusting as the floor was, they refused to let him lie down. Instead, in the middle of that small room was a hard, uncomfortable, wooden chair. Danyal sat up in that chair without slouching, and without moving.

Only minutes passed before Danyal began slouching, exhausted from being awake for well over thirty-six hours. That's when the guards struck, using their clubs to hit the chair as hard as they could. They weren't beating Danyal with the clubs, but they didn't need to. They needed him to be able to write.

Night soon fell. Hours upon hours later Danyal's exhaustion reached such a point that even the clubs had no effect. But the guards had their orders. Without further warning, his tormentors dumped several-gallon-buckets of ice-cold water on Danyal's head, leaving him shivering and gasping for air. The ice went down his shirt and pants, getting lodged inside, making parts of his body go numb.

"This will all end, you Qadiani pig, if you just tell us what we want to know. How many have you converted to Qadianism?!"

Danyal refused to answer—the cycle continued.

They would dump ice water on him to push him to a hypothermic state, and then let him warm up again, slowly. Again and again and again. Danyal felt his body going into shock. He knew well what would happen to those he named. He refused to sentence them to the same torture.

"I'm a missionary! You know what missionaries do! I don't have some big pension or salary. My job is simple service to people!"

"You filthy liar! Curse be on you. Burn in hell!"

They refused to believe that a person would live Danyal's lifestyle. They were used to mullahs demanding large salaries and unquestioned authority. It didn't make sense to them how Danyal worked.

"But you've spied on me and seen me work! I have nothing to hide."

Still, they were convinced that despite the surveillance, arrest, and continuing "investigation," Danyal was lying.

The due date to present Danyal at court came and went. He sat in that cell, awake, freezing, and in immense physical and mental pain. He'd been awake for over two days now with no idea of what was to come.

The Third Night

Danyal remained awake that entire second miserable night. It was so much worse than the first. But things weren't done deteriorating. In the morning, Detective Gulab once again approached him in his menacing, arrogant manner.

"Are you ready to speak up now, you Qadiani bastard?"

Danyal didn't bother responding. He'd already suffered through an entire night of the guards hurling abuses at him and at the Messiah, Ahmad. Gulab came up close and sniffed Danyal, as if he emanated some odor.

"He even smells like a Qadiani pig." He spat on Danyal. Turning to the other police officers, he barked, "Did you make sure he stayed awake last night?!" They nodded. They were pawns and simply did what they were told—just following orders. "Then perhaps he hasn't thought long enough. Make sure this scumbag doesn't fall asleep. Let him suffer for his disgusting beliefs." With that, he left.

Danyal thought about giving in. It would be so easy. "What about my daughter? They could kill me now and she would grow up fatherless." The thought to give in would grow, but in a fury, Danyal would push it out.

The third day slowly passed in that condition. Danyal was now awake for almost ninety hours straight, sitting in that chair. The room was dark with a single bulb somewhere in the corner. Every time he dozed off, ice-cold water would shock him back to reality. And they kept putting the pen and paper in front of him to tell them what they wanted to know. Danyal kept pushing it away.

Every second felt like an hour. He was losing his concept of time. With ice bath after ice bath, the third day drew to a close. The officers still refused to let him see his family.

It's been over fifteen years since Danyal was tortured for his faith. Yet, remnants of that torture remain to this day. And in speaking with his brother Nasir, this broader picture emerges. As the third day drew to a close, Nasir finally tracked down where Danyal was being held captive. Nasir then lived in Peshawar. The second he heard of Danyal's arrest, he made haste to Lahore.

No one had any idea where Danyal was. Fortunately, Nasir knew a bailiff who worked for a high-ranking judge in Lahore. For the bailiff's protection, I've given him a pen name, Amjad. Amjad was in his fifties and well known. Nasir knew Amjad was an Ahmadi Muslim and that he was well-connected. Soliciting his help, the two spent the next three days traveling from one office to another, from one station to another, making calls, meeting individuals, and tracking down Danyal. They met dead end after dead end, trying to piece together clues to a real-life mystery. Finally, after three exhausting days with just slightly more sleep than Danyal had received, they discovered his location—a station they soon discovered was notoriously known for torture.

A horrific scene emerged when he and Amjad finally found Danyal. Amjad, it turned out, knew Detective Gulab. As soon as they walked in, Detective Gulab—who did not know Amjad was an Ahmadi—greeted him with a smile.

"Amjad, my friend! What brings you in?"

Amjad wasted no time.

"You ignorant fool, how dare you arrest Danyal? What have you done to him?!"

Gulab was startled but kept his composure. He innocently replied, "I swear I've done nothing to him! There isn't a mark on him!"

"Let us see him immediately. On what charges are you keeping him?" Amjad continued.

"Sure, sure, you can see him." Gulab cowered before Amjad. "But, my friend, he knows well why he was arrested. He's violated the blasphemy laws by preaching Qadianism. We arrested him for his own safety."

"His own safety? Do you think I'm that stupid, Gulab?"

"Amjad, I assure you it's for his own safety. Mullahs were telling us they would kill him. We brought him in merely until the pressure dies down, that's all."

Amjad walked up to Gulab to make sure he had Gulab's attention. "We are leaving tonight with Danyal. He isn't spending another day here."

"I'm sorry, Amjad, I'm afraid I cannot do that." Gulab's guards brandished their pistols.

They reached Danyal's cell. One of the guards knocked and a guard inside opened up.

Nasir and Amjad walked in and there Danyal sat in his chair. Nasir called out to him. He didn't reply at first. He just sat there, slouched over, barely moving. Nasir went to put his hand on Danyal's shoulder and asked a bit louder if he was in pain. He nodded slowly yes. Nasir asked him to speak up. He couldn't, he didn't have the strength to.

"Don't worry, Danyal, we will get you out of here!"

All Danyal did was nod. Nasir asked him a few more questions—if he knew where he was, what was happening to him, why they were keeping him—but he refused to respond. Finally Nasir raised his voice.

"Tell me what they're doing to you in here!"

Danyal mustered up his strength, looked up, and said, "Don't...don't ask me that." And as quickly as Nasir and Amjad had walked in, the armed guards forced them back out. Nasir yelled back, "Danyal, we're going to get you out of here okay?! Hang in there! We'll get you out of here!" The guards shut the door.

I listened intently to Nasir and replied, "What about Gulab's claim that they were protecting Danyal?"

"It was a lie. Do you protect people by torturing them? By arresting them without giving them a single reason? Gulab was lying through his teeth. They arrested Danyal to torture him and get information about other Ahmadis in Lahore."

Remarkably, Danyal doesn't remember his brother's visit. He concedes, however, that it must have happened only because Nasir says it's true. Danyal, meanwhile, spent the night in immense pain. And like the nights before, it was a long, long night. He felt the paralyzing shock of ice water every time he began to doze off. His body was numb but the pain somehow increased.

They were trying everything they could to break him, but the promise he made to himself remained firm. Yet again the guards put the pen and paper in front of him, demanding that he write the information they wanted. Danyal knew that should he sign anything, he was signing a death warrant for whomever he named. He refused to break.

For Danyal, another torture, many times bigger than the physical torture, was when they cursed the Messiah Ahmad. It was something he couldn't tolerate and at times he would lose his temper. At this, the officers would increase their insults. They tried different tactics to trick Danyal into threatening them with violence. Danyal's response was only that God Almighty would hold them accountable. But this had no effect on them.

Deep into the night Danyal began hallucinating. It was all he could do to force himself to focus, to not forget his promise to remain firm. He fought back against efforts to give in and remained resolute. Another eternity passed and finally the guards changed shifts—his only indication that he'd made it through the night alive and with some of his sanity still intact. Perhaps this was the day he'd be freed from this torture? He wasn't sure how much more he could take.

The Fourth Night

Danyal missed his family terribly. He thought of his wife, daughter, and aging mother. He thought of his late father who honorably served in Pakistan's Air Force for twenty-six years. What sort of nation treats the family of a veteran in such a manner? Even a veteran's valiant service could not overcome Pakistan's bigotry against Ahmadi Muslims.

The hallucinations worsened but something inside Danyal kept burning. Something wouldn't let him give in. He anchored himself with the conviction that he wouldn't break. The next morning brought the same drill. Detective Gulab marched into Danyal's cell and cursed at him to no end. More threats, more intimidation, more mockery.

The intimidation increased. Physical torture is only one type of torture. Keeping Danyal awake was painful, the ice water was paralyzing, the repeated insults and degradation was demoralizing, but the mental torture they were about to subject Danyal to haunts him to this day.

Frustrated that the curses, intimidation, and sleep deprivation proved fruitless, Detective Gulab suddenly left Danyal's cell. Danyal was unsure why. Everything was silent. For a split second he even thought perhaps he got off easy that morning. His eyes grew heavy. Suddenly, Danyal heard someone screaming, "No, please, no!" His ears perked up.

The screaming became louder and more desperate. "No, oh God, no. Please, not again. Don't, not again!" Danyal was frozen, eyes wide and afraid of what was coming next.

Detective Gulab returned a minute later with several guards. This time, they brought another prisoner with them. Danyal had no clue who he was.

Gulab turned to Danyal once again while grabbing the prisoner by his neck. "This is your last chance, you Qadiani son of a bitch." They put a pen and a piece of paper in front of him. "Write down the names of those you've converted to Qadianism, and we'll let you and him go. Refuse, and you're responsible for what happens to him."

At first Danyal was confused. "Responsible? Responsible for what?" He pushed the paper away. But they certainly had his attention.

"So be it, you dumb dog." Detective Gulab threw the prisoner at the guards. "Take him, tie him down."

He was a young man, probably around Danyal's age. He was crying, obviously frightened. By his raggedy attire and dirt-covered face Danyal could tell he was probably living close to total poverty, or perhaps someone already homeless. The police probably picked him up on the street, maybe for petty theft or some other minor crime—and knew they could use him as bait.

Another thought crossed Danyal's mind—perhaps he'd been in this prison so long, that this was all that was left of him? The man was skinny—his skeleton frame clearly visible. His cheekbones protruded from his face. The guards tied him tightly to a chair. His crying became more audible. He spoke to Danyal.

"Please, bhai, whatever it is, please give them what they want. Please don't let them do this to me."

He had no idea who Danyal was either. "Do what to you?! What are they going to do?!" Danyal turned to Detective Gulab. "What are you going to do to him? Why is he here? He has nothing to do with me! I have nothing to do with him!" It took every bit of energy he had to speak.

"Oh, but he has everything to do with you, Qadiani! You think your faith is so precious, do you? You filthy apostate! You scum! This is what your Qadiani faith is doing to this man—a man who has done you no wrong."

With that, Gulab motioned to one of the guards to proceed. The man began weeping uncontrollably and begged for forgiveness and mercy. From whom, who knew? He screamed at Danyal to help him. Danyal didn't know how to help. He, along with the guards, knew what was coming. Danyal was in such a state of confusion that he still didn't understand what was about to happen. He blinked and the guard raised his club high. The man screamed in anticipation. Danyal blinked again and down came the club with full force. A sharp crack resonated throughout the dark chamber, immediately drowned out by a blood-curdling scream.

Danyal screamed out, "No! Stop! What are you doing! Stop!!"

Detective Gulab replied. "Stop? No, no, we cannot stop. You caused this, you hell-bound Qadiani! This is your doing! This is your fault!! This is what happens when you break the law!"

The man spoke up to Danyal through sobs. "Please make them stop, bhai. I'll do whatever you want. Please tell them what they want to know. I'll do what you tell me. Just make them—"

Another vicious crack, and another deafening scream filled the dark cell. The heavy club crushed his frail body. Detective Gulab motioned the guard to put the pen and paper in front of Danyal yet again. His mind raced. "Do I give them the information they want? Perhaps I could fabricate it? Perhaps I could warn the people I name in enough time to escape?" Immediately he dismissed such thoughts. It was too risky. He had no assurance they'd release him. He couldn't bring himself to risk ruining their lives.

He blinked again. The club rose once again. Danyal blinked again and the club came crashing down. Danyal's thought process was interrupted as the innocent man let out another vicious scream. His body was bruised, broken, and bleeding. He was sobbing uncontrollably, out of breath. His breathing became irregular. He began to hyperventilate. He began begging for his mother. "Please, bhai, just tell them. Make it go away."

"Where's your Messiah now, you Qadiani? Tell him to come save this person. You see him bleeding? You son of a bitch! Do you see him?" Gulab grabbed Danyal's neck and forced him to look at his fellow torture victim. "His blood is on *your* hands! You and your goddamn arrogance! You bastard child! This is all your fault!"

The poor soul was drenched in blood. It was doubtful he had any family, or any family that cared for him enough to get him out of that hellhole. Danyal could barely make out the man's words anymore; his sobbing was uncontrollable. But it didn't matter. Danyal already knew what he was saying.

The guard struck the man again, and again, and again. Danyal closed his eyes and tried to shut it out. No sooner did he do so than a guard dumped another ice-cold bucket of water on his head. [Danyal would later tell me, "Even now, without closing my eyes, I can see his torture right in front of me. It is like a movie, but the terrifying horror is that nothing about it is fake."]

Despite the unbearable mental torture, Danyal refused to sign any documents for them. So they continued. They beat the man mercilessly until that final blow to his skull.

All Danyal heard was a crack, but no scream—the man fell unconscious. His blood and tears dripped to the floor. He was bleeding from his arms, his chest, and from his head. Several of his bones were undoubtedly broken. His sobbing stopped. They checked his pulse to ensure he was still alive. And then they untied him and dragged him away like an animal.

It was hard to tell whether the torture lasted five minutes or an hour. It felt like an eternity.

I chimed in. "Did you ever find out his name?"

"Does it matter?"

"I just wanted to say a prayer for him."

Danyal shook his head no. "The mental torture of being forced to watch him, and his physical torture, was far greater than any physical torture they forced upon me."

"Did you ever see him again?"

"Him? No. But..." Danyal paused.

"But what? What??"

"But...the day wasn't over yet." Danyal paused again. "In fact, it was only early afternoon. The hallucinations returned as the adrenaline rush died down and my exhaustion resumed. It wasn't long before the adrenaline came back though."

I was afraid of what Danyal was about to say, but I knew it already.

They continued to torture Danyal to stay awake, trying time after time to force him to write down the information they wanted. They saw how being forced to watch them torture another person affected him. As night fell, Danyal heard another man plead for his life down the hall.

Back on the bus, I peered past Danyal out the window. The drizzling rain subsided and the sun had broken through the clouds. A bright blue sky made its return. My ears began popping as the bus headed up the side of a mountain. Mountainous northern Pakistan is such a beautiful part of the world. The scenery is breathtaking and the air is fresh and crisp. No sooner did I begin to appreciate Pakistan's beauty than I was sucked back into that dark, putrid prison of torture. Danyal continued.

They brought him in, just like they did with his predecessor. They didn't even ask Danyal to sign the paper this time. They just tied the man down and began beating him mercilessly. He begged and pleaded with Danyal to give them what they wanted. Danyal couldn't. Danyal used every ounce of his being to scream at them to stop, but they wouldn't.

The man shrieked in pain, bleeding from every inch of his body. He begged Danyal to make it stop. And like his predecessor, he too was soon unconscious and dragged away like an animal. All he left was a trail of blood behind him.

The guards were taunting Danyal, showing him they were in control. And while Danyal still refused to break, his torture worked in other ways. It has worked every day for every year since. And it will likely continue to work as a torture to Danyal's memory as long as he lives.

I chimed in again. "Danyal bhai, you'd been awake for over one hundred hours now. I'm sorry to ask these questions, but were they feeding you at all? What about using the restroom?"

Danyal took a deep breath. "Well, they gave me a few morsels of food a day but I was at the point of starvation. I was hungry beyond explanation as it wasn't even close to being adequate. And hell, I had all the water I could ever want."

"And what about the restroom?"

"I… Let's not talk about that, okay?"

I got the picture and wisely chose not to push the issue. The second person was dragged away and the guards brought in a third. Danyal watched as they broke his body in two.

That pen and paper sat in front of him, mocking him, playing tricks on his mind. Danyal just kept reminding himself that if he gave in now, he might be freed, but he would definitely condemn dozens more to the same or worse torture. After four days of no sleep, however, Danyal found it more and more difficult to convince himself. He came close to giving in, again, but held fast to the promise.

Danyal suffered through another night of physical and mental torture. The guards brought in several more people, only to torture and discard of them because Danyal wouldn't break. The night dragged on for an eternity before the guards finally changed shifts.

Danyal eventually found himself back in front of Detective Gulab the following morning. Another series of demands for information and another series of insults against the Messiah, Ahmad. And plenty of cold water to keep Danyal awake.

He hoped against hope that today would bring salvation from torture. He hoped that the mental torture he saw was his last night of suffering. But horrifyingly enough, the day dragged on and no one came for him. It wasn't long before night fell, and the torture rose again to a new level of terror.

The Fifth Night

Back on the bus with my cousin, the bus slowed down as it passed a particularly narrow passage on the mountainside and entered a sharp curve. The scenery was splendid. The sky was now a clear, bright blue. The clouds had receded and I could see for miles into the horizon. A patchwork of green and brown painted the countryside.

Locals set up shop at this junction, knowing that busses passed through. The bus was moving slowly enough for them to sell drinking water, food, and snacks to travelers directly through the bus windows. I looked over as a slender young boy, perhaps sixteen or seventeen, banged on Danyal's window to get our attention. He had a bottle of water in one hand, a samosa in the other. Danyal waved him off and the boy moved on.

"What a life, huh?"

Danyal sighed. "Can't say they're not working hard to make an honest buck."

"True. Must respect that, I suppose."

A minute later the road opened up and the bus accelerated once more, leaving a trail of road salesmen behind us. Some held fistfuls of bills and others hurried back to catch the next bus. Danyal continued his story.

As the fifth day drew to a close, Danyal realized that this was probably it for him. He came to realize that he would probably die in that filthy prison. He had taken far more than he ever thought possible. He didn't think he could take any more… But, he was wrong. The fifth night was the worst night of Danyal's life.

The guards' threats didn't work. Their curses didn't work. Their sleep deprivation didn't work. Their water torture didn't work. Making him watch them torture other men didn't work. So they made things worse.

On the fifth night, Detective Gulab entered Danyal's cell again.

"You are really starting to anger me, you Qadiani pig. Who the hell do you think you are?! All you have to do is sign one document, give us a few names, and all this will stop. No one else has to suffer. But NO. NO! You have some idealized view that you're being noble. That you're doing the right thing. You're out of your goddamn mind! You're going to hell, you son of a bitch! Do you understand that?! You are going to hell so just stop this torture on yourself and tell us what we want to know!"

Danyal remained quiet. There was no use in responding to him (not that he had the energy anyways). Gulab motioned to the guards and they dunked ice water on him again.

"Are you paying attention, you pig?! Do you hear what I'm telling you?!"

Danyal hyperventilated at the ice-cold water but refused to acknowledge the abuse. Gulab paced back and forth for another minute, hoping Danyal would finally, finally break.

"So be it. You earned this, you bastard."

Detective Gulab motioned to the guards to follow him out of the room. Like lemmings they complied. As it was the night before, there was silence for a moment. Right away Danyal felt his eyes close. But a shrill scream filled the dark night—another torture victim.

Danyal's heart sank at the thought of another young man being beaten to near death. But the gaurds didn't drag in another young man—they dragged in a young woman.

She shrieked at the top of her lungs. They dragged her in, kicking and screaming. They dragged her by her hair and clothes, which were ripped, tattered, and filthy. And they tied her to the chair in front of Danyal.

Gulab continued his taunts. "You see this poor innocent woman, Danyal? Do you?"

Detective Gulab grabbed Danyal's neck and made him look at her. She was a young woman, probably no more than twenty. She was badly bruised as it was. They forced Danyal to look at her directly in the eye.

He saw fear. He saw horror. He knew what they were about to do to her. She knew it as well.

Gulab spoke matter-of-factly. "This poor woman will now have to suffer because of your blasphemy and arrogance. Are you okay with that, Danyal? You filthy dog. Are you enjoying this?"

"Don't...touch her," was all he managed to get out.

"Oh, we'll be doing a lot more than that."

Gulab put the pen and paper in front of Danyal. After a moment of doubt, he shook his head no. It was the most painful moment of his life. The woman was already weeping uncontrollably. It took every ounce of will power in Danyal's body to remain firm and push the paper away.

"Suit yourself then, pig." Gulab motioned to the other guards to begin, and left the room.

But they didn't begin beating her. Not at first. First came the humiliation; the disgusting, horrific humiliation.

Excitedly, the guards began groping and molesting. They tore at her and ripped her clothing. They put their hands all over her body—every part of her. She screamed in horror, in humiliation, in pain—but it fell on deaf ears. They demanded Danyal write down names that he couldn't. He pleaded with them to stop but they wouldn't. And while they continued to rape the young woman in front of him, he sat helpless.

After a short while they again presented Danyal with the pen and paper. The woman was sobbing maniacally. Her cry was beyond desperation. She was exhausted, and afraid, because she knew what was yet to come.

Danyal flinched again but turned the pen and paper away. This time the guards wasted no time trying to convince him. No sooner did Danyal shake his head no than the first club rose high above the woman's head. Danyal blinked. The club came smashing down with full force on her back.

She screamed at the ground, afraid to look up, unable to look up. Before her scream ended, it was cut short—the wind was knocked out of her as another club hit her ribs. She couldn't breathe. She was in so much pain. And Danyal—Danyal was forced to watch her.

He was paralyzed. He'd been tortured for almost a week. And they kept beating her mercilessly. It took every ounce of his body to scream at them to stop but to no avail. And it wasn't long before she collapsed, bloody, bruised, and unconscious. They dragged her out just like the others. And that was the last Danyal saw of her.

But the night was far from over. She was just the first.

The Sixth Night

The fifth night was the worst night of Danyal's life. To this day those sights and sounds are scarred on his brain. To top it off, the guards forced him to remain awake throughout it all. Danyal suffered through another eternity of torture, and watching others suffer through torture. Finally, the guards changed shifts. Danyal survived the fifth night, albeit barely. Like before, he waited for Detective Gulab to come in and berate him. Only he didn't come. The guards started asking one another if they knew where he was. No one seemed to know.

The day dragged on as they waited for Gulab. But he didn't show. After nearly a full week, when they couldn't get anything of interest out of Danyal, the guards were compelled to release him. The sun set, and Danyal finally received his freedom on the sixth night of torture.

"You got your freedom? Your brother finally came back to get you out?" I asked Danyal.

"Yes, finally. I spent a week in that center."

It caught me by surprise—that it ended so suddenly. "What do you remember thinking as they pulled you from that hellhole?"

"That week was horrific. I suffered through it while witnessing brutal torture on men and women and while continuously staying awake. Despite their horrible efforts, I am grateful to God that I was able to stay firm in my faith, and firm in protecting those they wanted to torture next. But the horror of those who suffered with me…that has remained with me always. May God give them justice."

I looked out the window again as we rode through another street market—teenage kids ran alongside the bus to sell us water and snacks. "Do you ever feel anger, shame, frustration that this happened to you?"

"You know, Qasim, people are arrested every day for any number of reasons—violence, drugs, theft, murder. But I am proud of being behind bars that week because it was for the sake of Islam, for being an Ahmadi Muslim, and for being a humble servant of the Khalifa of Islam."

I nodded.

"So I say that by God's grace, I was saved from that brutal torture that men and women face in Pakistan every day—that torture of mental imprisonment."

Despite that week's horrors, Danyal won a moral victory. He didn't recant his faith, he didn't endanger others whom the police wanted to torture, and he didn't give his tormentors the satisfaction of breaking him. But moral victories aside, the torture had a lasting impact, one that affects him to this day some fifteen years later. For months on end after his release, Danyal suffered from intense insomnia and post-traumatic stress disorder. It improved as time passed, but some cuts leave permanent scars.

Nothing came of the men who tortured Danyal—no investigation, no accountability, and no consequences. They were allowed to continue as if they'd done nothing wrong. And, after all, they hadn't done anything wrong. They'd done exactly what the constitution allowed them to do—take every measure to stop the spread of beliefs that were deemed blasphemous. They were doing Pakistan a favor, and God forbid Pakistan reprimand them for this noble deed.

I was but fourteen or fifteen, and in the United States, when all this happened to Danyal. In fact, I didn't even discover any of this until much later. But as I listened to Danyal relate his torture, I couldn't help but recognize that this was the answer to my burning question after the Mong massacre. Why live a life in the open, but subject to intense persecution, when you could instead live a relaxed life and enjoy your family? The answer was simple. The alternative *wasn't* a quiet life "to watch your children grow up."

The alternative was to contribute to your own persecution, to become your own executioner, to tie your own noose. Few aspects of life are strictly black and white. But when it comes to freedom of conscience—either you champion it, or you oppress it. No such middle ground exists. It is a difficult challenge because if you are the minority, resistance often seems futile and dangerous. Yet, succumbing to that danger, that perception of fear, that uncertainty of who might be waiting for you when you arrive home—that attitude does more to harm the next generation than any oppressive regime ever could.

Conceding to such oppression ensures your children won't grow up. They will always remain mentally imprisoned, afraid and limited from ever reaching their full potential.

As I sat on that bumpy bus ride, in a crowded seat, next to the man with nauseating body odor, in the middle of a nation seeking to kill me only because of my faith, I realized what was staring me in the face all along—Danyal wasn't jeopardizing his daughter by resisting his tormentors. On the contrary, his resistance protected her. Whether he died or survived was secondary to the fact that his resistance ensured that the ideals of freedom of conscience would live on. It lived on after the Mong massacre as it lives on today. No force in the world can destroy an ideal, for that remains protected in the hearts of heroes. Danyal was and is one such hero. The Mong martyrs are such heroes and will always be remembered as such.

A Tortured Nation

Danyal should have died that week in that putrid prison. This thought weighs on my mind because I would like to believe Danyal's case was an anomaly or that his arrest was an outlier.

Despite the horrific experience through which Danyal suffered, however, the reality is that this is what Pakistan's religious minorities face all too often. And not everyone is as fortunate as Danyal—at least he escaped with his life.

Master Abdul Qudus—an Ahmadi Muslim father, teacher, and citizen of Pakistan—suffered for his faith with intense police torture in 2012.[43] Police finally "allowed" his family and friends to reclaim him after thirty-five days of torture. His family rushed him to a hospital as he gasped for air, desperate to save his life. But the damage was done. During his thirty-five-day torture, Master Abdul Qudus was hung upside down by his ankles, beaten for hours on end, denied proper food, clothing, or sleep, and tied to the ground as his ribs were crushed with heavy construction rollers.

He, like Danyal, refused to recant his faith. He refused to sign fabricated documents that alleged criminal activity to leading members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan. Police finally released him; not because he wouldn't speak, however, but because he no longer could. He'd fallen unconscious, his internal organs crushed, and his internal bleeding too severe. Perhaps it was God's special mercy that he regained consciousness just for a day or two, long enough to say somber

goodbyes. He returned to his Maker, leaving behind his wife and four children.

The police officers that tortured Qudus suffered little accountability. Likewise, Pakistan's media refused to report on Qudus' torture and murder. As far as most of Pakistan was concerned, the event either did not happen, or was fabricated Qadiani propaganda to gain sympathy from the West. Such pathetic thinking has become the default argument for any anti-Ahmadi leader. In America, Islamophobia exists. In Pakistan, Ahmadiphobia runs wild.

In the late 1990s, Mirza Ghulam Qadir—an Ahmadi Muslim who completed his master's degree at George Mason University in Virginia—suffered a fate similar to Master Abdul Qudus.[44] Without consequence, extremists attacked and murdered him because of his faith. His heroism spared untold grief and suffering to countless innocent Ahmadi Muslims. But Pakistan was simply unconcerned.

Danyal survived his torture, while Mirza Ghulam Qadir and Qudus did not. And these three, unfortunately, are but three stories of countless ongoing incidents of unjust arrest, unspeakable torture, and unremorseful police. Numerous Christians accused of blasphemy have been murdered, even under police protection. For example, Qamar David, a Christian who was sentenced to twenty-five years in 2006 for allegedly blasphemous text messages, was found dead in his Karachi jail in March 2011.[45] No doubt he suffered brutal torture similar to what Danyal and Qudus suffered through. In July 2010, two Christian brothers were shot dead on the footsteps of a Faisalabad courthouse—each originally summoned on the charge of alleged blasphemy.[46]

Even those acquitted of blasphemy are subject to vigilante justice. Muhammad Imran was released from an April 2009 blasphemy charge—for a lack of evidence, no less—but was still gunned down in March 2011.[47] Pakistani Hindus suffer similar fates. As aforementioned, human rights organizations estimate that every month roughly twenty-five Hindu women are forcibly converted to Islam and married to their rapists.[48] Police, meanwhile, stand idle and become enablers, selling themselves to the highest bribe.

And thus the irony. The biggest victims here are not necessarily just those who suffer and often die from this torture. The biggest victims are Pakistan's silent and ignorant majority that remain oblivious to these realities. The biggest victims are those outside Pakistan who suffer from terrorism as a result of unmitigated extremism flourishing in Pakistan. The biggest victims are Pakistan's future generations, raised in a world where might is right, and righteousness is wrong. Those who have been

tortured no longer have the power to stop their torture, so they bear it with patience and dignity. Those of the silent majority, the international community, and the future generations naively believe they are exempt from that prison torture. Should they remain silent, however, and it won't be long before they find themselves tied to a chair, shivering from an ice bath and sleep deprivation. They see themselves secure but instead they sit in the mouths of vipers. After all, Pandora's box doesn't close so easily.

I was lost in my thoughts when Danyal nudged me to get up. It was our stop.

"Hurry, these busses don't wait long, get moving." Danyal urged me to walk faster. It proved difficult as I was trying to squeeze through way too many people while still carrying my luggage. We stepped out of the bus into the warm sun and fresh air. It felt great not to smell that guy's body odor any longer. I could finally breathe through my nose again.

"Now where?" I turned to Danyal.

"Now we hang out here for just a few minutes until the bus to Peshawar comes."

Still trying to collect my thoughts and return to reality, I realized I needed to use the restroom. Looking around quickly at what I suppose was technically a rest stop, I had just enough time to find a bathroom—basically a side area where no one was watching. With no actual faucet, I washed my hands with what was left of my drinking water. I jogged back up to meet the bus as it pulled up. Fortunately, this bus was a little less crowded, a little cleaner, and a lot more comfortable. Danyal paid the driver and we found two empty seats next to one another. We sat down. A minute later, we were on our way again.

I turned to Danyal, "I don't really know what to say, Danyal bhai."

"About what."

"You know what, the torture. I…I'm just at a loss for words."

"Well, what do you expect to say?"

"I don't know…I'm sorry?"

Danyal chuckled. "It's okay, just don't let it happen again."

I smiled. "You know, one day I'm going to write a book about all this. And I'm going to tell the world your story and—"

Danyal threw his hands up, "For the love of God, spare me, I've been tortured once already. I don't need them coming after me again."

Danyal's lightheartedness was refreshing. It showed me that though the scars from torture remained, his tormentors failed to break him. He didn't view himself a victim and didn't play the prey.

The bus rumbled on towards Peshawar. We sat in silence. I'm not sure where Danyal's mind was, but mine kept repeating his torture, over and over again. I felt emotionally and mentally drained simply from sitting and listening. The cool breeze coming through the window and the comfortable seat combined with the gentle hum of the bus engine was enough to warrant a nap.

I motioned to Danyal that I was going to pass out. He nodded. Slowly I drifted off to sleep as we returned to a city I hadn't been to in twenty years. I'm not sure how long I slept. The bus must have hit a pothole because a sudden jolt woke me. The sky was quickly growing dark when I opened my eyes. At first I tried to close them and sneak back into my comfortable nap, but my ears were already alert to the multiple conversations around me. Someone complained they were hungry. Someone else said they were cold. A baby was crying in the background.

I sat in the window seat. The window was slightly open and a cool breeze came through, as did the late afternoon sun. The bus rolled along. The horn blared as we passed through a station without stopping. I peered out the window to get a glimpse of the sights, hoping to garner where exactly we were. It was difficult to tell. The station had already passed. I could only see motorcycle rickshaws carrying travelers to local distances that were probably too far to walk.

Now in January 2006, my mind wandered back to the last time I visited Peshawer some twenty years prior. Little did I know that this visit would prove to be the more memorable one.

15

Remnants of a Black Slave

"*Today let us walk through the bazaar in shackles, wet eyes and restless soul are not enough, being charged for nurturing concealed love is not enough, today let us walk through the bazaar in shackles.*" — Faiz Ahmad Faiz

Bilal is one of the most famous figures in Islamic history. He was a particularly despised Abyssinian slave of particularly dark complexion. When Bilal learned that a man named Muhammad preached a religion in which all men and women—regardless of color, caste, or creed—were equals, Bilal professed his acceptance. To his dismay, however, his slave master, Umayyah ibn Khalaf, was not amused. Umayyah was an ardent idol worshipper, and he was furious that Bilal accepted Islam without his permission. When Bilal refused to recant his faith, the tortures began.

Umayyah would deny Bilal food and water and tie him to the ground, naked, on the scorching Arabian sand at midday. Bilal would remain firm.

Umayyah would whip Bilal's naked body mercilessly to force him to recant his faith. But Bilal would remain firm.

Finally, Umayyah would compress Bilal's bare chest with heavy stones in an attempt to crush the life out of him. As Bilal gasped for air his slave master would mock and ridicule him, demanding he recant his faith. He'd offer Bilal comforts and ease—if only he would give up his blasphemous faith.

But Bilal would remain firm and point with one finger, quietly reciting with the little breath he could muster, "*Ahad, Ahad*" ("God is One, God is One").

It wasn't long before Umayyah lost control and began beating and torturing Bilal so mercilessly that it was obvious Bilal would soon be killed. A man went running to Prophet Muhammad to warn him of Bilal's impending fate. Without hesitation, Muhammad sent his closest

companion, Abu Bakr, to go to Umayyah and purchase Bilal's freedom—whatever the price.

Abu Bakr was not only the first man to accept Muhammad's claim to prophethood, he was also wealthy, extraordinarily generous, and well-reputed for his honesty and integrity. He ran posthaste to Umayyah's home and found Bilal on the cusp of death, gasping for life under the crushing torment of a heavy boulder.

Abu Bakr yelled out to Umayyah, "I offer you twenty silver coins for Bilal's life!"

"Done!" replied Umayyah with a menacing grin. Abu Bakr handed over the handsome payment, which Umayyah gladly accepted. In taunt Umayyah added, "You fool, had you offered even one silver coin I would have accepted."

Calmly, Abu Bakr replied, "Had you demanded one hundred, I would have paid it."

Bilal's struggle and Abu Bakr's heroics have inspired countless throughout history. And fortunately or unfortunately, it seemed history was to repeat itself in my own family.

The bus pulled into its final destination. The journey to Peshawar was over. We were finally here, and in one piece at that. It is truly amazing what the mind can remember. Here I was returning to a city I lived in as a child. As I saw places I hadn't visited in nearly twenty years, I realized that so many images in my mind I'd convinced myself were from a dream state were instead reality. Marketplaces, streets, walls, alleys, so much of it flooded back. As we began walking through the bazaar, Danyal turned to me and instructed, "Qasim, stay close by me. Don't wander."

"No problem." I soaked in my surroundings—the people, the pulse, the sounds, the attires, the hustle and bustle, the aromas—all incredible.

And I did what any tourist would do—I pulled out my camcorder and began recording. Danyal walked in front of me, talking about what, I wasn't sure. I had to stop just for a minute to check my camera battery. It needed to be changed so I took the extra moment to do so. When I looked up, I saw Danyal in the distance and hurriedly made my way towards him. He was unaware that I had fallen behind.

As I hurried, a group of women wearing "shuttlecock" *burqas* caught my eye. A burqa is loose-fitting outerwear that conceals a woman's entire body. A shuttlecock burqa additionally conceals the face. Instead, women look through a net covering the eyes. It is called a

shuttlecock burqa because women wearing them literally look like badminton shuttlecocks.

I could not have been more obvious as a tourist. Forgetting about catching up to Danyal for the moment, I began recording, thinking to myself, "This'll be a great video to show everyone back home." I thought a few people had stopped what they were doing and started watching me but dismissed it as paranoia. After all, why would a guy wearing jeans, running shoes, a sweater, carrying a travel bag, recording women wearing shuttlecock burqas be of interest to them?

Satisfied with the video I'd taken, I looked up to catch Danyal, but quite literally gulped instead. The path in front of me was blocked. And I couldn't see Danyal.

Entrapment

It wasn't my paranoia after all. My video recording attracted attention like flies to sugar. A group of clerics confronted me. Thinking quickly, and trying to pretend I hadn't seen them, I casually pulled a 180 to go the other way. Too late. Several more clerics stood behind me. I looked right and left and several more quickly joined to close the circle. I was surrounded. I was trapped.

A short, stout cleric walked up to me, mere inches away from my face. He had an angry look in his eye, dark bushy eyebrows, wore a cap, and had a Santa-Claus-grey beard. At first, he spoke in Pashto, a language common in Peshawar but not really elsewhere in Pakistan. I don't speak or understand Pashto, but knew if I responded in Urdu he'd understand me. I also knew that as soon as I spoke Urdu they'd understand I was an outsider—as if it wasn't obvious enough already.

I pursed my lips and ruffled my eyebrows, signaling that I didn't understand. I pretended that I didn't know why he approached me. He asked me in Urdu, "Do you speak Urdu?"

I put my hand to my ear, indicating I couldn't hear him.

"Do. You. Speak. URDU?!" he replied, more annoyed now.

I gave an "Ahhhh, Urdu," response, and nodded slowly while frantically looking around, wondering where the hell Danyal went. Meanwhile, nothing attracts a crowd like a crowd. What was originally maybe ten had ballooned to well over twenty people surrounding me. Fortunately, I was taller than most all of them and continued to scan the bazaar for Danyal.

The cleric continued, "You dare take photographs of our women?!" I stalled, again pretending I didn't hear what he said. Another

cleric grabbed at my bag. I instinctively pulled it close and pushed his hand away. Another grabbed at my arm and I pushed back. Things were about to get real bad, real fast.

"Give us your camera!" the cleric demanded.

"Where the hell was Danyal?" I thought to myself, continuously looking around.

"Give it to us now!"

I couldn't see Danyal anywhere. The clerics were getting louder and more aggressive.

"Give us your camera now! You dare expose our women!"

I didn't reply but my mind raced. "Expose your women?! Dude, who knows if they really were women? I'm just takin' your word for it," I thought to myself.

The cleric tried to reach for my camera again and I pushed his hand away again, harder.

I shoved my camera in my bag. A hand reached out from behind me and grabbed my shirt collar. "Well, now I've done it," I thought to myself. The hand pulled hard. I lost my balance and pushed over a few clerics on accident to stay on my feet. I couldn't look up to see who pulled me back but it didn't matter much at this point, I was pretty sure I was done for. "Dammit, Danyal, where the hell are you?" I struggled to maintain balance and finally did after a just a few strides. The person pulling me kept pulling and I tried to get him to let go—he wouldn't. I finally managed to look up to see a sight for sore eyes—a furious Danyal dragging me along. We took a few more steps and jumped on a rickshaw. The rickshaw hit the gas and we were off.

My heart was racing a mile a minute. The clerics took a few strides after us and quickly realized they weren't going to be able to catch us. Danyal's barging into the crowd and dragging me back caught them off guard. They didn't see him coming, and by the time they realized he wasn't one of them, we were already on the rickshaw. Meanwhile, I was clutching my bag as tight as I could. Danyal was shaking his head. I was breathing heavily, trying to get my bearings. My heart continued to pound.

I looked at Danyal, still breathing hard. "That was awesome!"

He wasn't amused. "Awesome? What the hell is the matter with you, Qasim?!"

"Well…" I found myself stalling again.

"I gave you *one* instruction, just one, and you couldn't even do that. I turn around and you're gone, vanished. Where? I have no idea. No

indication, nothing. And so I retrace my steps and see all these mullahs around some poor idiot, only to realize I'm related to said idiot."

I smiled. "Well, on behalf of said idiot, I thank thee. And what took you so long?"

"I swear, I should tie you with a rope like a four-year-old child."

"Wanna see the video of the shuttlecock burqa women?"

"No, I don't want to see your stupid video. Do you realize how dangerous it is here?"

"Well, I thought—"

"No, stop thinking. You can think another time. For now, just do what I'm telling you to do. You have no idea how volatile things can get here. You don't know what they'd do if they found out you're an Ahmadi...or an American for that matter."

Remnants of a Black Slave

Danyal wasn't necessarily angry, but he was definitely upset. In need of a subject change, I quickly decided now was as good as any time to ask about Riaz.

"What happened to Riaz?"

"Never mind Riaz. Don't pull this kind of stunt again, okay?"

"Okay, I won't. Look, I'm sorry, it was an accident."

Danyal just shook his head. I paused for a moment and continued.

"But really, I want to know about Riaz."

Danyal took a deep breath, still shaking his head. Finally he turned to me and asked, "What do you know about him?"

"Not much, just that he was my cousin and he's dead."

Danyal motioned for the rickshaw driver to stop. He slowed down and pulled to the side. We hopped off.

"Where are we?"

"We're a bit of a walk from my sister's place."

"Oh, come on, you know how I feel about walking."

"I know, but what I want to show you... Just trust me on this."

I reluctantly pulled my bag strap around my shoulder and we began walking. Danyal spoke up again. "To really understand what happened to your cousin Riaz, you have to know who Dolat Khan was."

"Okay, who was Dolat Khan?"

"Dolat Khan was a Sunni Muslim who lived near here in a Peshawar suburb known as Shab Qadr, starting way back in the 1970s.

He was from an extremely wealthy family, and an extremely religious family. He also worked with Riaz's father-in-law—Rashid Ahmad."

"So Rashid Ahmad was an Ahmadi?"

"Yes."

I made the mental note that this was before blasphemy laws were in effect, but after Ahmadis had already been declared as kafirs. We stopped at an intersection. If I thought it was reckless crossing streets in Rabwah without looking, here in Peshawar it was absolute suicide. Red lights are only suggestions and stop signs don't exist. We bided our time and quickly bolted across.

"So Dolat tells Rashid he wants to join the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community," Danyal continued.

"Just like that?"

"No, it was after visiting Rabwah and studying on his own. But, Rashid encouraged Dolat to not be in such a hurry. Still, it wasn't long before Dolat insisted again and soon thereafter joined."

"So how does Riaz tie into all of this?"

"Well, it wasn't long before Dolat's family realized he joined the Ahmadiyya Community. And once blasphemy laws were passed, Dolat knew he was in trouble. By now, he had spent years studying. Rather than 'wait' to be discriminated against, he openly challenged his family and friends to a public debate on religion."

"Interesting approach."

"He had debate after debate in public, refuting cleric after cleric. This made some clerics furious."

"What was the time frame now?"

"It was 1995, some thirteen years after Dolat joined the community. Dolat's older brother, Shahid Khan, was furious that his brother—in his eyes—became an apostate. So, after several years of unsuccessfully trying to get him to recant, Shahid gave up and helped coordinate a plan."

"What plan?"

"He went to the police."

"I don't understand."

"Shahid went to the police and filed a blasphemy case against his own brother. He had him arrested for blasphemy."

I was speechless.

"Shahid told Dolat he'd only be released if he recanted—which of course Dolat wasn't about to do."

"How did Rashid respond to this?"

"Well, Rashid knew he had to act quickly. He went to his son-in-law, Riaz—your cousin—and together they planned to put up the bail money to get Dolat out of jail. The bail hearing was on the ninth of April at the courthouse."

"Okay, so that's how Riaz ties in… Go on."

"By now, Dolat's been in jail for about three weeks." Danyal stopped. We'd come to a bazaar that consumed the street we were on. Cars could barely get through at a crawling pace. The road was mostly dirt. A putrid stench filled the air.

"Ugh, what is that smell?" I felt like gagging.

"Meat."

"Meat?"

"Yep, raw meat. Keep walking. This is the other thing I wanted to show you."

As we walked through the bazaar I saw chickens, goats, entire cows skinned and hung by hooks in broad daylight. Another few hundred meters and Danyal motioned for me to turn into a shop. Inside, we passed a curtain and I let out a gasp. I'd always wondered how terrorists got their hands on guns and other weapons so easily. Now I had my answer. The store had everything a terrorist could ever want to create carnage. AK-47s and handguns as far as the eye could see. And God only knows what weapons remained hidden.

It occurred to me that the gun shop wasn't particularly hard to find, or to get to. People walked in and out as if it were Home Depot. I turned to Danyal, "How is any of this legal?"

"Who cares—who's going to stop them? The bribed police? The corrupt judges? The incompetent politicians? Who?"

I would've loved to have recorded it, but the risk was too much. "Well, you're right, this I had to see to believe. And I think it's probably time to go before I inadvertently anger someone again."

As we walked out I picked up where we left off regarding Riaz. "So Riaz and Rashid are going to the courthouse and jail on April 9 to bail out Dolat, then what?"

"Well, in the days before April 9, word got out that the two were going to put up Dolat's bail money. The judge presiding over Dolat's case knew he'd done nothing wrong, but ignored Dolat's pleas."

"Oh, a corrupt judge. What a surprise."

"So, that morning of the ninth, Shahid and his cronies put up fliers all over the neighborhood announcing that today was the day for Jihad against the apostates."

"Referring to Ahmadis?"

"Yes."

"How was this not reported to the police?"

"It was, and even if it wasn't, the fliers were everywhere and impossible to miss. Police did nothing. Knowing the risks, Riaz and Rashid proceeded to the courthouse to bail Dolat out of jail. Lo and behold, Shahid was there waiting for them."

"What a prick."

"Rashid tried to walk past Shahid and into the courtroom, but Shahid blocked the path. When Rashid tried to push past him again, Shahid reached back with his hand and slapped Rashid as hard as he could. And that's all it took. Their Jihad began."

"Meaning."

"The mob of about twelve or fifteen people swarmed Rashid and Riaz, mercilessly beating both. The mob dragged both outside, where nearly a hundred people were waiting."

"Waiting for what?!"

"To join in. Riaz and Rashid were split apart. Mind you, Rashid was an old man by this point and Riaz was also in his forties."

I clenched my teeth as if bracing for impact.

"The mob let loose on Rashid with clubs and fists. A hard blow to his head and he soon lost consciousness. This actually worked out in Rashid's favor. The mob dragged him across the courtyard and dumped his body into a nearby stream, screaming, 'He's dead!! He's dead!!' The mob clerics yelled out cheerfully. Unbeknownst to them, he was only unconscious."

"Where the hell were the damn police this whole time?!?"

"Standing right there. They got involved eventually. Rashid was unconscious, but Riaz had a worse fate awaiting him."

I took a deep breath and listened.

"Shahid led the charge against Riaz. 'Recant your apostate beliefs, you infidel!' Between repeated blows to his head and body, Riaz responded with the Muslim declaration of faith, the *Kalima*: 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger.' Somehow this wasn't enough."

"What did they want from him? What were they demanding he say?"

"I don't think they even knew. Mob mentality had taken over."

Despite the repeated blows to his head, Riaz would not stop uttering the *Kalima*. Frustrated and increasingly angry, Shahid called for a horse-drawn carriage and a rope. Shahid stopped everyone from beating Riaz just long enough to tighten a noose around his neck. Together, the

clerics pulled and dragged him by the neck to the horse-drawn carriage. Riaz gasped for air. He clutched at the noose to remove it but it dug into his skin. All the while, between gasps of air and painful groans, he continued to recite the Muslim declaration of faith. The carriage driver protested.

"Why are you doing this to him? He's declaring himself a Muslim!"

Shahid responded. "You don't know the depths of his infidelity. He is a confirmed kafir and we must cleanse Pakistan of this cancer."

"I don't believe you! Let him go at once!"

Shahid responded angrily, "Unless you want the same fate as him, you'll do as you're told!" He pushed the driver back in the driver's seat.

The driver did as he was told. The mob secured the rope to his carriage. Shahid ordered the driver to go at full speed, to which he reluctantly complied. Those watching continued to hear Riaz recite the declaration of faith until suddenly—the voice stopped. The mob arrived at the police station some mile and a half later. Their plan was to throw Riaz in prison for his alleged apostasy. A cleric kicked Riaz's still body to make him stand. Other than a cloud of dust and dirt, Riaz didn't respond. "Unfortunately" for them, Riaz was no more. His neck was broken—only because of his faith.

Seething, I interrupted Danyal. "You said the police would intervene. Where the hell were they? When were they planning on intervening?!"

Danyal shook his head. "Riaz's body laid there, scarred, bloody, dust-covered, and still. For the clerics, now it was time to celebrate."

"What does that mean?"

"Several clerics dropped their pants to urinate on the corpse."

I felt like punching a wall.

"And that's where the dispute began. Some clerics wanted to urinate on Riaz's lynched corpse while other clerics said to do so would be disrespectful."

"Disrespectful?! It was okay to beat and lynch someone for his faith but this, *this* was disrespectful?"

"The clerics turned on each other and fighting ensued—those that wanted to urinate on Riaz's corpse against those that refused to do so."

"Don't tell me."

Danyal knew what I was thinking. "That's when it occurred to the police to do their job. They intervened to stop the dispute."

When tragedy strikes someone you know, it is often painful. But when it strikes your own flesh and blood, words can rarely describe your anger, hurt, and frustration. I thought about how Abu Bakr heroically saved Bilal from a torturous death. But where was Riaz's hero? Where was his protection from a torturous death?

Rashid and Riaz's only crime was protecting Dolat's freedom of conscience. Instead, one was beaten within an inch of his life, the other tortured to death, and the third remained in prison. Meanwhile, those who committed the unthinkable were left untouched and unrestricted.

"We're here."

I looked up to see that we'd arrived at Danyal's sister Sadia's home. She'd just had a baby about ten days earlier. I'd named her Fatiha, which means "victorious." An infant child does wonders to relieve stress. But it also brought another question to my mind. What type of life would Fatiha experience in Pakistan? She was but days old, but even in her innocence, she'd be considered an apostate. Apostates in Pakistan are considered worthy of death.

This is what Pakistan had sadly come to—dictating an infant's faith under threat of capital punishment.

We spent but a few days in Peshawar. I successfully avoided any more shuttlecock-burqa episodes. I spent the remaining few weeks in Pakistan largely secluded and contemplative. I went running when I could, spent time with Uncle Bashir, and enjoyed time with family I hadn't seen in over a decade. I also visited my grandparents' tombs as often as I could.

It wasn't long before I returned back to the United States. With a newfound appreciation of my ancestry, I began to increase my efforts to educate, inform, and build bridges of tolerance. It was at that time where I received my first actual hate mail. Soon, death threats would follow. I learned quickly that thick skin is a must-have for public advocacy—even for something as basic and agreeable as championing universal freedom of conscience.

My 2005 visit to Pakistan began a chain reaction. It wasn't long before I'd visit again. I realized just how much work needed to get done, and how much more I needed to learn.

16

Brain Drain

"*The educated differ from the uneducated as much as the living differ from the dead.*"
— Aristotle

It was the mid-1990s. She was only fifteen and already in the eleventh grade. Most kids her age were only in the ninth. Only fifteen and she was coming to terms that her father was dying. Most kids her age had parents that were hardly in their forties. She now stood up to leave her classroom because she just couldn't take any more abuse. Most kids her age simply couldn't understand why.

The day started like any other. Ayesha sat down in her first period Islamic studies class—a college-level requirement in Pakistan. As the students settled down, one of Ayesha's classmates raised her hand to get the teacher's attention.

"Yes?"

"Madam, a few of us had a question."

"What?"

"Are Qadianis real Muslims or not?"

Ayesha looked up. Her mind jumped off her ailing father and onto her teacher, wondering how she'd respond.

Her teacher's casual tone changed to one of annoyance. "They are absolutely not Muslim. They're filthy kafirs. They step on the Qur'an, worship their Khalifa. Nothing about them is Islamic. How could they be Muslim?"

Ayesha could feel her face getting red, not out of embarrassment, but out of anger. She was already younger than all her peers and the only Ahmadi Muslim in the class. Now she had to deal with this? Her mind was torn. Should she stand up for her faith and risk ostracizing herself, or keep quiet and peacefully live to see another day?

Her teacher continued.

"Qadianis don't pray like Muslims. They don't fast like Muslims. They don't perform *Hajj* like Muslims. They're just filthy, filthy beings. You must stay away from them. They practice black magic and they've been known to trick innocent Muslims into converting to Qadianism."

Ayesha was speechless. She could not believe the propaganda she was hearing. She was only fifteen. She wasn't ready for this. This wasn't her fight. Her father was dying; she shouldn't be burdened with this. And who would have thought that her teacher—her mentor—would turn out to be such an ignorant person? The battle within her mind raged—speak up or stay silent? Protect her faith or protect her reputation and grade? She wished she had the courage, but she couldn't seem to find it that day. Her teacher continued to bark bigoted propaganda. Ayesha broke. This wasn't her day to fight back. Maybe another day, another time, but not today. The mental abuse was too much to handle so Ayesha stood up to leave.

And then, without thinking, her mouth opened and she blurted, "Madam, you're wrong. I am an Ahmadi and everything you've said is a lie. None of it is true. We are Muslims and we follow Islam."

Her teacher was surprised—Ayesha was more surprised. Her teacher didn't know Ayesha was Ahmadi, and Ayesha didn't know she had it in her to speak up.

"You're a Qadiani?"

"No, I'm an Ahmadi," retorted Ayesha.

Her teacher gathered herself. "Child, you know nothing of Qadianism. Your parents have brainwashed you. Your religion is not Islam."

"It is too Islam, you're telling false information to the class." The class fell deathly silent. No one had previously spoken to the teacher in such an authoritative manner. Ayesha knew she was in way over her head. But it was too late to do anything about it now. Finally, a voice spoke up behind her. Another girl in her class.

"Um, Madam. Our neighbors are Ahmadi and they don't do any of the things you're saying." Ayesha felt a sigh of relief.

Another student spoke up. "Yes, we have some Ahmadis in our family. We don't agree with them but they practice Islam just how we practice it."

Ayesha could feel her heart racing with relief.

Now it was the teacher's turn to turn red with anger. "You children are foolish and ignorant. You have no idea what you're saying. Qadianis are even worse than Shias."

Now even more students stood up—the Shia students. "What's wrong with Shias?"

"Why, they worship Imam Ali and insult the Qur'an!"

"Madam, that is a lie. We do not worship Imam Ali. We do not insult the Qur'an."

The teacher began stammering, trying to backtrack. Another student stood up. A Sunni.

"If you're lying about Shias, how do we know you're not lying about Qadia— I mean, Ahmadis too?" Several other students echoed the sentiment.

Flustered and unable to respond, the teacher changed the subject. "We don't have time for this nonsense discussion. Let's get to our classwork."

She'd been humiliated and couldn't take much more mental abuse. Ayesha sat back down in her seat, a sense of relief combined with lingering nervousness now resonating throughout her body. She was grateful that somehow she found the courage to speak. She was relieved that her classmates came to her defense that day. But she knew the fiasco wasn't over.

In December 2007, Ayesha and I, newly married, found ourselves exploring the streets of a northern Pakistan town called Murry—incidentally named after Mary Mother of Jesus. Ayesha related this heartbreaking childhood memory. As we walked down the cobblestoned road I turned to her and asked, "Ayesh, what do you mean the fiasco wasn't over?"

"I didn't have to wait long to see how I'd be treated now that the teacher knew I was Ahmadi Muslim."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning the rest of the semester I was an outcast. She wouldn't talk to me, wouldn't look at me, wouldn't acknowledge me."

"Can she do that?"

"She did do that. Who was going to stop her? And most of the students joined in with her."

"I thought they came to your defense."

"Yeah, a few did, but peer pressure can be a horrible thing. A week didn't go by before most everyone treated me like I had a disease."

I shook my head in dismay. There wasn't much to add to the discussion. Ayesha spoke again.

"Look, Qasim, a church named after you."

I looked up to see a magnificent cathedral behind a commanding gate. "Church Rashid," the sign read. "Wow! That's great! Let's go inside?" I asked more than declared.

"What? Really? Are you sure?"

"Yeah, sure, why not? I didn't realize I was this famous."

Ayesha smiled and nodded. I took her hand and we walked up to the gate—only to be left disappointed.

CHURCH IS CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE BY ORDER OF MULLAH SHAH

I read the sign a few times just to be sure I wasn't missing anything. A padlock and tightly wound chain secured the gate shut.

"It figures. God forbid a church be kept open in Pakistan." I turned to Ayesha. "This is ridiculous. I doubt Mullah Shah knows a damn thing about Christianity—or for that matter, Islam."

"You're probably right."

"I just don't understand why these mullahs insist on this ignorance and bigotry."

Ayesha looked at me dead in the eye, "People fear what they don't understand, Qasim."

I couldn't help but remember the last time I heard that line, as a ten-year-old standing in my father's office. Exasperated, I turned to Ayesha, "I suppose whether it's a teacher in the classroom, or a mullah in the street, such is the curse of the illiterate."

The Illiterate Nation

Pakistan boasts a 50 percent literacy rate. For women, the number is even lower, under 24 percent in some parts of the country.[49]

Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan maintain a 100 percent literacy rate. In Rabwah, for example, more women have their bachelor's degrees than men. I provide these statistics not to boast about Ahmadis, but to prove a simple point. Conventional wisdom would assume that a nation would promote and learn from its most educated citizens. Having recognized how Pakistan treats Dr. Abdus Salam, for instance, I realized conventional wisdom was not all that conventional in Pakistan.

Instead, I discovered a "cement ceiling" for Ahmadi Muslim students in Pakistan. I say *cement*, and not *glass*, because no one denies its existence. A glass ceiling in the United States is typically understood as an unseen and unbreachable barrier (typically for women and minorities) in the corporate workplace; it is a barrier that unfortunately exists and no one likes to talk about it. But with the cement ceiling for Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, the barrier is much more visible and the facts are clear—Ahmadis are not to be recognized or given the opportunities to advance. Pakistan has even refused Ahmadis the right to freely run their own schools. Instead, the government has usurped all Ahmadi-owned schools and refused to return them.

To analogize, imagine if U.S. Congress took control of the University of Notre Dame and forcibly removed any right of the Catholic Church. This is exactly what Pakistan has done to Ahmadi-owned schools—and only to Ahmadi-owned schools. Despite repeated efforts to regain legal control—including openly paying the government millions of rupees as bureaucratic fees—the government has refused to return private and constitutionally-protected property.

One terrorism victim I met is Samar (which is not his real name).

Samar was born in the late 1970s. In other words, according to the Constitution of Pakistan, he was born a kafir. Samar's father was in the military prior to and during Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship. As such, promotions were impossible because everyone knew he was an Ahmadi Muslim. He was forbidden from official trips to other countries and given general second-class citizenship. Still, he served his country because he loved his country.

Samar, meanwhile, quickly recognized the pain of living under a cement ceiling. Because of his faith, in 1999 his fellow university classmates boycotted Samar, and then attacked him. A Jammat e Islami mullah-incited mob of about fifty or sixty people pinned Samar down and tried to crush his head with a large stone slab.

At the last moment, a few non-Ahmadi Muslims, not of Maududi's ilk, came barging in and pushed away enough people to allow Samar to escape. But when he reported the incident to the university, he was advised to not file a report under threat of expulsion.

Still, due to anonymous grading, he graduated at the top of his class. Although his high grades landed him an excellent job, a second murder attempt on his life changed everything. After two years of having to travel everywhere with a company-issued armed guard, he decided to call it quits and leave Pakistan once and for all.

Samar's last day of work was May 27, 2010. He was set to fly out on the thirtieth. If only he'd known of the horrors planned for May 28, he might have left sooner. His university experience from 1999, however, is neither isolated nor a thing of the past. In June 2008, twenty-three Ahmadi Muslim medical students—fifteen women and eight men—were expelled from Punjab Medical College because of their faith. Four of the students—all female—were in their final year, mere months from graduation.

Likewise, Ahmadi students who score at or near the top of their class in national testing are forbidden both from mentioning their faith, or if they reside in Rabwah.

For example, in 2012, Sitara Akbar Burooj, a ten-year-old Ahmadi Muslim girl from Rabwah broke a world record by scoring the highest ever score on the GCE O Level biology exam. The year prior, she became the youngest to ever pass the GCSE chemistry exam.[50] Yet, every Pakistani media outlet either refused to report on this landmark achievement, or reported that Sitara resided in Chiniot, Pakistan. (Chiniot is a town near Rabwah especially known for its anti-Ahmadi Muslim propaganda and bigotry.)

Ahmadi Muslim doctors are another popular target for terrorists. In Multan in 2009, two doctors—a husband and wife couple—were tortured and murdered because they were Ahmadi Muslims.[51] And countless more such examples exist.

The end result of these repeated attempts to delegitimize, demoralize, and destroy the lives of Ahmadi Muslims is a massive brain drain. After completing her second Masters degree in the United Kingdom, Ayesha began her PhD in international economics. She would have loved to return to her birth nation and serve her fellow Pakistanis with education—but Pakistan could care less, on account of her faith. Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan who are able to leave for another country often do. Some leave happily while others leave painfully. Some are exiled while some exile themselves.

And some become so desperate to move to a better life that they risk life and limb. Such was the case in 2011 when nearly one hundred Ahmadi Muslims sought asylum in Thailand.[52]

The Thai Ahmadis

My friends often ask me how and why I have contacts in what seems like every nation on Earth?

One unique characteristic of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is that it is established in over two hundred nations worldwide. But just because the community is established in a particular nation, doesn't mean that that nation particularly cares about human rights.

Take Thailand, for example.

In June 2011, nearly one hundred Ahmadi Muslims fled Pakistan to seek refuge in Thailand. They fled arrest for their faith, death threats, and murder attempts. Unfortunately, Thailand was not the refuge they sought.

In the ensuing months, these one hundred Ahmadi Muslims languished in a putrid Thai prison. All hundred shared one toilet—men, women, and children. Their options grim: Remain in a Thai prison, or return to Pakistan and—if they're lucky—enter a Pakistani prison. If unlucky, vigilante justice would have ensured their end.

The horrific living conditions notwithstanding, one woman gave birth inside the prison cell. The child was born to parents ousted from their native land and in a nation in which he wasn't welcome. Through painstaking coordinated efforts of numerous human rights activists, several Ahmadi lawyers, and countless volunteer hours by the Thai chapter of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community—these tortured souls finally received asylum in nations other than Pakistan. They are but one example of the choice each of the millions of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan face on a regular basis.

Likewise, while this book focuses on Pakistan, Ahmadis face similar trials of torture and persecution in Indonesia, Egypt, UAE, Libya, Bangladesh, Malaysia—and unfortunately the list continues. Each really deserves its own volume of books to adequately tell the story.

Atheists Don't Exist in Pakistan

In the meantime, Pakistan continues to suffer a brain drain. It's simple math. A nation that chases away its intelligentsia—believers or non-believers—can only survive for so long. It is no coincidence that Pakistan's focus on education has systemically decreased as laws of oppression of conscience have increased.

My purpose in writing this book is to fight for the rights of all people to enjoy freedom of conscience without oppression—atheists and agnostics being no exception. But as I mentioned earlier, many have advised me that "atheists don't exist" in Pakistan.

Two types of people told me this. The first types of people recognize Pakistan's oppressive atmosphere. They make the statement to mean that most atheists know better than to openly declare their atheism. Many have chosen to stay quiet and live peacefully, albeit under the veil of oppression. Yes, it is an oppressive life but at least they get to live without threat of being murdered in cold blood—at least not for their atheism anyway.

Then there are the second types. The second types of people who claim atheists don't exist in Pakistan are ignorant individuals who *literally* believe that atheists don't exist in Pakistan. They consider Pakistan as some magical society in which every person believes in God with all their heart and soul.

Throughout my research for this book I invested time to find and encourage atheists to relate their stories of life in Pakistan. Unfortunately, I ran into several obstacles. Those willing to discuss the matter with civility chose not to participate due to fear of being discovered. Those who had no fear of being discovered simply did not believe that a Muslim would champion freedom of conscience, and thus chose not to participate. I respect their decisions. But hopefully this book will serve as evidence that Muslims actively work to protect the rights of atheists to non-belief. Such Muslims not only exist, but also publicly and emphatically declare that no atheist should ever suffer oppression of conscience.

In 2005, only 1 percent of Pakistanis considered themselves atheists.[53] By 2012, that number increased to 2 percent.[54] That number will likely grow in 2013 as well. But the prejudices against atheists aren't dispersing any time soon. An active atheist blogger in Pakistan, who works under a pseudonym in the public sphere writes,

> Within my circle of friends I am very open. My family knows I don't believe in God but they don't know that I am in a leading role in such an organization. Obviously I use a pseudonym—that alone should tell you how open I can be. [Atheism] is on the rise. There is a huge amount of closet atheists in Pakistan. For every member of the organization I get an email from five others telling me that they want to join but can't.[55]

He goes on to reference blasphemy laws, a recent Gallup poll report that 78 percent of Pakistanis approve of death for apostates, and cites immense social pressure to unquestionably believe in God as a reason why people are turning to atheism.[56]

As I reflected upon this I could not help but arrive at the following question. Is it fair to call something a belief if it is forced upon someone? Let's say someone held a gun to your head unless you admitted two plus two equals five. Even if you admitted that two plus two equals five, would that count as your "belief"? Certainly not. Yet, 78 percent of Pakistanis are so insecure in their Islam, they would sooner kill someone than let them leave Islam. They believe in a god so weak that he needs to force himself on mankind. This being that they call a god needs approval, needs to be liked, needs to be accepted, needs to be loved. And if he isn't, then he forces people to like him. And if he still isn't, then he forces people who do "love" him to kill those who don't.

In other words, these 78 percent of Pakistanis are mimicking the behavior of a rapist murderer.

After all, that is the proposition a rapist offers, no? As long as a woman goes along with the rapist's will, no problem exists. In fact, the woman may genuinely feel loved that someone gives her so much attention and protection. If, however, a woman objects to the rapist's demands, the rapist forces himself on her without regard for her well-being. And if she still does not give in, then the rapist kills her.

Think about it. Apply the same steps to Pakistan's blasphemy laws. As long as a citizen goes along with Pakistan's blasphemy laws, no problem exists. In fact, a citizen may genuinely feel loved and cared for that the laws give him and his beliefs so much attention and protection. If, however, the citizen objects to the blasphemy laws' demands, the laws force themselves on him without regard for his well-being. And if the citizen still does not give in, then the blasphemy laws kill him.

Just as the moral act for a rapist is to satisfy his hedonistic desire without regard for who they harm or kill, the moral act for 78 percent of Pakistanis is to fulfill their egotistical desires without regard for who they harm or kill.

So, is it any wonder that atheism is growing so rapidly in Pakistan? These human beings are in fact making a moral decision—a decision to reject the ideology of a murdering rapist. These atheists recognize that freedom of conscience must remain free, and are choosing to remove themselves from a society that insists on enforcing its will on others and murdering those who do not agree.

As a Muslim and as a human being, I champion this effort to ensure that freedom of conscience remains free. Every sane person must. Any ideology that compels itself on others is a dying ideology. It is a dangerous ideology. It is a destructive ideology. It is an ideology worth abandoning and condemning.

But this is exactly the dying, dangerous, and destructive ideology that Pakistan's clerics and government insist on protecting. This is exactly the ideology that Pakistan's atheists are rejecting. I cannot help but stand with them. To do otherwise would be the height of hypocrisy and immorality.

I must distinguish that the ideology Pakistan follows is one alien to Islam. Islam champions universal freedom of conscience for all people of all faiths, and for all people of no faith. The Qur'an's relentless protection of freedom of conscience has in fact been a driving impetus for this book. Pakistan's acts malign itself and its people. I humbly submit to the reader, do not let Pakistan's acts malign Islam or Prophet Muhammad.

The bottom line is this: atheists are—like any Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Jew, etc.—human beings first. As such, basic human rights condemn any attempt to compel belief for any reason. For Pakistan to have any hope of survival, its oppressive ideology ingrained in blasphemy laws must be uprooted and discarded, and replaced with education, pluralism, tolerance, and compassion. Pakistan's current path only leads to self-destruction.

And, by the way, there's no need to scare atheists with the threat of eternal hell for their non-belief. Atheist or not, to live in Pakistan with any "unapproved" belief is hell enough already.

Leaving Pakistan…for Good

Our trip was winding down. We'd visited Nathia Gallee, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Murry, and Attock. Ayesha and I had enjoyed exploring beautiful mountains, taken memorable horse rides, and saw parts of Pakistan few ever get to see. We had one more stop on our way back to Rabwah. It wasn't a major city, but considering that Ayesha's late father served a career in Pakistan's military, we decided to stop by the military-base town along the way—Abbotabad. Had we known that we were hanging out in the same town as Osama bin Laden, I might be twenty-five million dollars richer right now. All I remember is that Abbotabad was clean, smelled nice, and we had a terrible meal at a local restaurant. Here's a tip: never order hot dogs in Pakistan. Some stories are better left untold.

Ayesha and I were set to leave Pakistan on the day after Christmas in 2007. Family pressure, however, encouraged us to stay another few days and leave after New Year's. The following evening, we strolled the Rabwah bazaar, window-shopped, and enjoyed our now extended holiday.

Her phone buzzed—a text from a friend in Rawalpindi.

"BB in bomb blast. In critical condition."

We rushed to find a shop with a television. It didn't take long to do so. The TV was already on with several dozen glued to the screen. The headline screamed across the screen while Ayesha's phone buzzed again.

"BB is dead."

A panic seemed to sweep the nation as the beloved Daughter of the East, Benazir Bhutto, was now no more. Ayesha was devastated, as were countless aspiring young Pakistani women. While I said nothing at the time out of respect for the former prime minister, I could not help but reflect on this tragedy's irony.

Some thirty-three years prior, Benazir Bhutto's father caved to pressure from extremists and declared Ahmadis as "non-Muslims." He opened Pandora's box, ultimately allowing Dictator Zia to enforce blasphemy legislation. The persecution originally focused only on Ahmadis, then spread to Shias, Christians, Hindus, and atheists. The religious violence and terrorism that was once the exception in Pakistan had since become the rule. The terrorism Bhutto Sr. unleashed in 1974 ultimately murdered his own daughter in 2007. Shakespeare himself could not have written a more depressing tragedy.

In an added twist of fate, in 1989—at a time when Zia had just died and his decade of destruction could yet be undone—Benazir Bhutto was asked if she would restore human rights to Pakistan. In particular, she was asked about the persecution of Ahmadi Muslims and her father's role in that persecution. This was a time when religious persecution was largely still limited to that of Ahmadis. Benazir had a golden opportunity to right the wrong and return Pakistan to its democratic track.

Instead, Benazir boastfully replied, "Qadianis were declared non-Muslims in my father's rule. How could I undo the *great service* my father did for Islam? My government will not give any concession to Qadianis. They will remain as non-Muslims."[57] While Bhutto Sr. *could not* undo the damage he'd done, Bhutto Jr. *would not* undo the damage.

Instead, ignoring that her own father died at the hands of extremists who demanded further oppression of conscience, Benazir embraced that oppression as her protector. She championed the oppression of Ahmadis. In a tragic case of Stockholm's Syndrome, Benazir fell in love with the extremist ideology that murdered her father. In the end, that same extremist ideology murdered Pakistan's most prized daughter.

At the risk of sounding apologetic, I refuse to believe Benazir was evil-minded or malicious. She made the mistake of a lifetime in terms of religious freedom, but little doubt exists that she was a strong woman who did more for women's rights in Pakistan than any political leader ever has. Who knows how much more she would have accomplished were she alive today. In fact, Ayesha owes much to Benazir as a Pakistani woman and as a student. In 2002, she became the first recipient of the Benazir Bhutto academic scholarship. This scholarship enabled Ayesha to travel abroad and complete her second masters degree. Thus, both on a national level and on a personal level I have a soft spot for Benazir because of the great work she did for Pakistani women and the great opportunity she afforded Ayesha. Yet, that makes it all the more painful when I reflect upon her tragic death.

Ayesha and I rushed home as quickly as we could. The entire nation shut down for days. After gathering ourselves from this national tragedy, we realized the hard reality—we were stranded. All flights were cancelled as Pakistan mourned for days on end. Fortunately, through a connection at an airline, we were able to book a ticket some three weeks later. We needed to get out of Pakistan before things got worse. Had Pakistan been a nation that protected freedom of conscience, we would have loved to live and raise our children in the land of our ancestors.

Instead, our departure only further contributed to Pakistan's brain drain. And today, it is no longer just persecuted minorities that wish to leave Pakistan. In 2012, Pakistan's Prime Minister Gilani was asked about a survey that reported that nearly one-third of Pakistanis want to leave the country because it is a "dysfunctional society."[58] Conventional wisdom would think that a prime minister would want to reassure his people. But Pakistan seems allergic to conventional wisdom. Gilani callously replied, "Why don't they leave then? Who is stopping them?"[59]

Fortunately, once we finally booked our tickets, no one was stopping Ayesha and me from leaving Pakistan in 2007. Which is exactly what we did. I write this book knowing the real possibility that I may never be able to safely return to the land of my birth, of my ancestors. Regardless, just as Ayesha and I feared, things soon did get worse in our birth country—much worse.

Pakistan was about to get a whole lot more dysfunctional.

17

Pakistani Terrorism on American Soil

"*Faith is a restraint against all violence, let no believer commit violence.* — Prophet Muhammad[sa]

Few in Pakistan consider me a "Pakistani" in the truest sense of the word. It isn't just because I'm an Ahmadi Muslim—though a prevailing anti-Ahmadi talking point is that we're Israeli agents trying to uproot Pakistan. That nonsense aside, the everyday Pakistani often doesn't see me as a Pakistani, and I suppose that is for good reason. After all, I was raised in Chicago, "the city of big shoulders." I grew up watching Michael hit "the shot," the Bears fire "Da Coach," and Cubs fans desperately hope every year was going be "the one." My English doesn't have a Pakistani accent, but my Urdu has an American accent. And it's not that I don't like cricket per se, it's just that if I express how boring I find cricket around Pakistanis, I risk getting run out of town.

I was raised in and spent over twenty years in Chicago. I loved every bit of it. But something—perhaps the frigid winters—pushed me to keep moving.

One April afternoon in 2009, that move became possible when something frightening but exhilarating happened—I was accepted to law school. I figured my application was mediocre at best. But, the gracious Admissions Dean Michelle Rahman at the University of Richmond School of Law felt otherwise. To be sure, it's her opinion that mattered.

So, just like that, I quit my job in the education sector and the three of us—my wife Ayesha and our then seven-month-old son, Hassan—left everything we knew behind and shifted to a place we knew nothing about. Several people tried to talk me out of it and I thank God every day I didn't listen.

Law school started in a fury, and I wasn't looking to fall behind. I buried myself in mounds of books while Ayesha and Hassan kept

themselves busy at the parks, malls, public libraries, community centers, and at the Maymont Children's Farm petting zoo. I didn't even know these places existed until the following summer.

My efforts to build bridges of understanding and interfaith harmony dramatically increased during law school. Over the course of the next year I had many "first" publications in papers like *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, and *Richmond Times Dispatch*. Perhaps it was a result of these publications that my name got out. On May 19, 2010, days after completing my first year of law school, I received a call from an NBC affiliate for a live television interview. A brilliant mentor and a friend to whom I owe much, Roberta Oster Sachs, was pivotal in helping make the interview possible. It would be my first time on television. Days after the interview, Dean Rahman stopped me between classes to congratulate me.

"Well done, Qasim. Something tells me this won't be your last time on television."

Unfortunately (yes, unfortunately), she was right. I was back on the air just nine days later for an interview I wish I never had to give.

But for now—on May 19—they wanted to bring me on as a twenty-something American Muslim immigrant from Pakistan. As it turned out, another twenty-something American Muslim immigrant from Pakistan, Faisal Shahzad, had just recently attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square. Thankfully, his own incompetence foiled his attempt. But, what was the difference between him and me? People suddenly wanted to know.

I remember thinking I had no idea how to act in a television interview. At first, the questions were typical.

> **News Anchor**: *"Kaysum" Rashid is from Pakistan, he is the same age as Shahzad. As someone from Pakistan, what went through your mind when you heard everything unfold?*

Moments before we went on air, the news anchor asked me how to pronounce my name. "Ka-Sim. Kaa-Sim," I told him. Two syllables. Just combine em, that's how you pronounce Qasim. It's like "awesome" with a "Q" in front of it. Somehow, that translated to "Kaysum."

> **Me**: *Well, I felt my faith, Islam, was hijacked and my nation, America, was also hijacked.*

The second question was a bit more in-depth, and made me think hard about my answer.

News Anchor: *And that's one of the most difficult positions that you find yourself in as an American but also a Muslim. Do you feel that your religion is being hijacked by this more radical element that is out there and really the sect of Islam in this country that's grabbing all the headlines?*

I wanted to scream. If you've ever been on television, on stage, or have given a public speech, you know that a million things go through your mind before you speak. My mind thought, "What in the world?"

First was his assumption that "one of my most difficult positions" is that I am an American but also a Muslim. When did I say that was difficult? I saw no conflict, not by a long shot.

Next, did he just admit that the media gives all the headlines only to extremists claiming to be Muslim? No wonder people are always left asking, "Where are the moderate Muslims?" Thus, to the 50 percent of Americans who watched the news broadcast and who have never once met a Muslim, all Muslims fell into one of two categories: they are either torn about their conflicts and loyalties to America *because* they are Muslim, or they are extremists like Faisal Shahzad, hellbent on destroying America *because* they are Muslim. After all, they "grab all the headlines," right?

Either way, it didn't paint a good picture as it catered exactly to the stereotype I was trying to combat.

Some people get nervous on television. I found out that I don't. Though it was my first time on television, it was not my first time discussing Islam in a live setting. I dismissed the cynic in me and appreciated that at the very least, this anchor was giving me the opportunity to set the record straight—he was allowing a moderate American Muslim to take a media headline and condemn radicalism. I replied to the news anchor's question with a message about Islam that unfortunately too few have heard.

Me: *They're certainly doing their best, but on the flip side of it, there are revival movements within Islam countering this. I belong to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Our motto is "love for all, hatred for none." Since our inception over 120 years ago, we have rejected any form of violence whatsoever. As a result of that, we've been branded as heretics by many of the same extremists that trained Shahzad.*

The anchor continued without missing a beat.

News Anchor: *And do you think—and there has been a lot of talk about this in the mainstream press—do you think there needs to be more moderate Muslims like yourself that stand up and say to this radical element that this needs to stop?*

I responded that our campaign for peace isn't some "post-9/11" bandwagon, but something we've long championed worldwide—and that we invite all people to join us in this campaign for peace. The interview was almost over. I was almost in the clear. The last question, however—

> **News Anchor**: *I'd like to ask from your personal perspective, how difficult is it for you, a Pakistani native, someone the same age as Shahzad, does it make your life more difficult when there are radical-people like this trying to do harm in this country?*

This question has stuck with me, and perhaps will always stick with me because of the events that followed in the coming days. I thought about what I'd learned, what I'd seen, what I'd experienced in my trips to Pakistan. As the anchor spoke, my mind flashed back to attempts on my grandfather's life. I thought about Mong, Pakistan, Yusef, and Ashraf and Abid—the two brothers who died on a blood-soaked floor, holding each other's hand for strength. I thought about Danyal's torture, and I thought about the innocent soul dragged by his neck through the streets near Peshawar. I thought about the Christian man I spoke with while he cleaned gutters, the Christian woman who ran away. I thought about Shia genocide and Hindu women being kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam. I thought about non-existent atheists. Really, compared to the horrors that my family, my brothers in faith, and my fellow Pakistanis suffer through even today, how difficult was it for me here in America?

> **Me**: *One of the beautiful things about America is that we have freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, so when radicals are trying to hijack my faith in Islam, the beauty of our country here is that it allows me to offer my point of view in an environment that is not hostile, which is, unfortunately, not something you find in countries like Pakistan.*

The news anchor thanked me for my time. I thanked him for the opportunity. If I've painted the news anchor to be unfair, then I must apologize. Despite his unintended flaws, he was a gracious host.

Faisal Shahzad's Pakistani-imported terrorism, however, was just the beginning. The blasphemy law and Mullah-Maududi-inspired terrorists who trained him would come back to haunt my loved ones and me just days later.

After all, Mong was just the sneak preview.

18

The Eighty-Six

"*There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.*" — Rumi

May 28, 2010. As the clock neared 6:00 a.m., the earliest rays of light playfully crept through my window blinds. The sun was about to fill the dawn sky at any moment. I finished offering *Fajr* prayer a short while earlier, recited the Qur'an, and stumbled down the stairs for a drink of water. Debating a morning run, I decided instead to scamper back to bed to catch another hour of sleep. But I promised to start getting back into shape…tomorrow maybe.

Meanwhile, eight thousand miles away in Lahore, Pakistan, an impending atrocity was coming to life. It was hot that day, even for Pakistan—easily over one hundred degrees. A dozen or so men rode in two broken-down vans—three in one and seven or eight in the other. The air conditioning was broken in both, making the heavy gear that each wore all the more unbearable. Their destination was two well-known mosques belonging to the wrong kinds of Muslims.

They were young men, late-teens to early-twenties. They could have been any men on any mission on any given Friday. But these were trained men for a particular mission for this particular Friday. Like the Mong mission, the goal was to avoid capture. Unlike the Mong mission, no getaway was planned. This was a one-way trip.

For several weeks now, the police had ignored all their warnings, as did the Punjab provincial government, and the Pakistani federal government. The public too had ignored their warnings, despite the clear banners and billboards on Lahore's major highways demanding Qadianis be discarded of. Everyone made empty promises but no one took action. It was time to take matters into their own hands. This was their last resort.

At least five wore suicide vests with ball bearings and explosives. Each had instructions to detonate his vest in crowds of worshippers. Each carried a fully loaded Kalashnikov, several grenades, and was trained in hand-to-hand combat.

It was 12:45 p.m. Friday prayers began at 1:00 p.m. sharp. The walking time bombs moved into position. Police were nowhere to be found.

In the days, weeks, months, and years since the attack, I've had the unique opportunity to sit down with those in the mosques on that fateful day. For safety, none of the names mentioned below are their real names. One is Adam, the son of the imam of one of the mosques—a position Danyal once held. Another is Samar. As mentioned earlier, Samar is a successful businessman who was spending his final days in Lahore before moving overseas to escape religious persecution. Then there's Isaac, and likewise, Omar—both of who witnessed untold horrors. And lest I forget, Zakaria, Danyal's nephew, and therefore my nephew—my own family. The story is incomplete without mentioning Waleed—and that is in fact his real name.

In the days after May 28, 2010, I received an email from a dear friend (let's call him Omar) relating eyewitness testimony of that massacre. Some of the following is his eye witness record. That afternoon, Omar was running late to the mosque. He normally left home at 12:55 p.m. but various commitments kept him back. Arriving home late, he found his father-in-law, Bashir, waiting for him.

"Should we go?" Bashir asked, suggesting that, due to the delay, they may as well miss worship services that week.

Contemplating the idea for a moment, both decided to instead head towards the Model Town mosque anyway. This mosque is also known as Baitun Noor, or "House of Light." Fortunately, they arrived only five or six minutes later than usual. Normally, Omar reached the mosque early enough to find a place in the front row. Today, due to a large crowd and his later arrival, he found an empty spot in the last row inside the mosque, close to the back door. Bashir found a spot in a different hall.

Meanwhile, a van screeched to a halt outside the Model Town mosque. Three heavily armed men emerged, Kalashnikovs drawn. The two security individuals posted outside the mosque were taken by surprise.

The Friday sermon had just begun when Omar heard the sound of gunfire. Random gunfire is not entirely uncommon in Pakistan, especially in major cities. The shots caused some commotion but people

soon settled down. Omar reminded himself that security was posted at the doors. He convinced himself that they would handle the matter. He had no way of knowing they were already dead.

A few moments later, however, the sound of gunfire came closer, louder, and more persistent. Omar expected to hear police sirens any minute. A minute passed, then another, then a few more—no sirens, just more gunfire.

Suddenly, the firing stopped. Omar held his breath, hoping it was over. A loud explosion rocked the facility. His heart sank. He heard yelling. Moments later, gunfire again ensued—this time not from outside the mosque, but from the mosque courtyard. Omar had no idea how many terrorists there were but one thing was now clear, they were under attack from suicide bombers.

Imam Mahmood Ahmed Shad stood delivering his Friday sermon. From his pulpit, he could see the terrorists coming towards them. Staying calm and collected, he continued his prayer, reassuring his congregation to stay firm and steadfast. He instructed the worshippers to calmly move to safety, while he stayed to ensure no one was left behind. Adam watched the imam closely—after all, the imam was his father.

The imam knew he was a target. Just a few months earlier in March, he received a phone call at home. They lived in quarters attached to the mosque. An unrecognized voice threatened to kill him. The imam kept the message to himself to spare his family the torment. That very evening while the imam attended a wedding, the home phone rang once again.

This time, Adam answered.

"Hello?"

"Where is the imam?"

"He isn't home at the moment; I'm not sure when he will return."

"Goodbye."

"Wait, who is this?"

As the unnamed person hung up, Adam heard a terrifying voice in the background, "The imam hasn't reached home. Let's finish him today. You two go to the Bank Square Market and—" *Click*. The phone hung up before the sentence ended. But Adam had heard enough.

Before he could react, the mosque guard Mohammad Anwar knocked on the door. Adam answered.

"Where is the imam?" He demanded to know.

Frantic, Adam related the phone call to him.

"Yes, I'm aware. They are following him. Call your father immediately and tell him not to leave the wedding until and unless we tell him to. Understand?! Under no circumstance!"

Adam nodded and complied, calling his father immediately. A few moments later, Mohammad sent several armed guards to pick up the imam and escort him back to the mosque. They slipped through the would-be assasins' hands and returned home from a different route—away from the market. The imam, Adam, and Mohammad survived that day in March. But none knew what today held.

Those sitting outside in the overflow rooms moved into the main hall. The doors were bolted shut from the inside to keep the terrorists out. Those in the main hall tried their best to quickly move to the basement. The main hall had windows, however, and it wasn't long before bullets began spraying through at a fatal clip.

Adam realized that there were two gunmen shooting. Despite the efforts of the more able-bodied worshippers to move everyone to safety—the gunfire moved just too quickly. The death count began rising. The imam stood firm, guiding people to safety. The imam's late father was close friends to the late Mian Sirajudeen. Most of the early victims so far were the elderly, as they were unable to get low and out of the way quickly enough. But the imam stood bravely to guide his congregation. Every person I spoke with marveled at his courage and bravery, his selflessness to put others before him without regard to his own life and family.

Suddenly, a spot of blood appeared on the imam's chest. Adam watched in horror. Another blotch of blood appeared. The imam looked down for a moment, then back up again. A look of peace prevailed across his face. And slowly, his arms dropped to his sides, his legs gave out, and his eyes closed. Adam stood speechless as the imam, his father, fell, never to rise in this world again.

His grieving lasted mere seconds as three grenades made their way near him. Still in disbelief about his father's martyrdom, Adam now ran for his own life, dodging gunfire and exploding shrapnel. A moment later he saw another familiar face—the guard Mohammad. He too had returned to his Maker.

Soon, the main hall was empty. All that remained were the injured, the dead, and a few young men and children tending to the injured. While the dead lay where they fell, the injured were dragged and carried to the sides, near the walls and away from the windows. The bullets ricocheted off the walls, emitting a piercing swipe whenever they bounced.

Samar took cover behind the mosque pillar but kept his head up to see what was happening. One suicide bomber attempted numerous times to force himself through the wooden door. Rather than run, a few courageous young men risked life and limb to keep him out—pushing against the door with all their collective might. Samar saw the attacker rushing towards the mosque with guns and hand grenades and a suicide jacket. Recognizing they were trapped, and that he didn't have much time, Samar pulled out his mobile phone to call the police emergency number. At first, there was no answer. He waited for what seemed like an eternity and after several minutes someone finally answered.

"Hello! We are under attack at Baitun Noor in Lahore! We need help immediately!"

"What is the situation sir?"

"We are under attack! Do you understand?! Terrorists are detonating bombs and killing us! Please send help now!!"

"Sir, we will send someone but we are very busy at the moment. Just be patient and we will get there as soon as we can."

Frustrated with the lethargic reply, and realizing it was no accident that police were nowhere to be found, Samar called his elder brother—a missionary in Rabwah—to warn of the attacks. He called the National Vice President of Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association Pakistan to strengthen security checkpoints at all mosques belonging to the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan. Who knew how largely coordinated an attack like this was? Soon, everything was in lockdown mode. Meanwhile, ambulances and other medical services arrived. Even the media arrived. Still, the police were nowhere to be found.

Back in Richmond, I was so far oblivious to everything going on. I finished my drink of water and saw my laptop open on the kitchen table. As is the habit of some one billion others around the world, I instinctively sat down to check my Facebook updates.

The first status update I saw made me do a double take.

"Attack in Lahore, five Ahmadis killed, not sure what's going on."

A chill ran down my spine while a prayer escaped my lips, "From God we are and to God must we return." It wasn't the most typical status update, but of course, it also wasn't the first time I received such news. Memories of Mong came screaming back.

I debated whether to wake Ayesha. She wasn't feeling well and I tried to rationalize that she needed her rest. The next status update answered the question for me.

"Twenty-five Ahmadis killed in Lahore, shooting going on right now! Police nowhere to be seen!"

I bolted upstairs to find Ayesha sitting awake anyway. She was chatting with her mother, who had just arrived from Pakistan two days prior. Ayesha's mother flew out of Lahore, having just visited the mosque under attack not forty-eight hours earlier. It was a mosque I too had visited in 2007.

"What's wrong, Qasim?" In just two and a half years of marriage, Ayesha already knew every crinkle in my brow, every crease of my lip.

I found myself trying to fight back tears.

"They...they're attacking our mosque in Lahore...they've killed twenty-five so far..."

Ayesha's look of concern turned to a look of horror.

We didn't own a television at the time. I'd sold it months earlier; rent, groceries, and diapers came at a premium. Ayesha grabbed my computer and pulled up the live stream of a Pakistani news channel. There it was in broad daylight, a live execution of lambs before wolves.

And the police were still nowhere to be found.

Back in Baitun Noor, Omar kept an eye on the bombers trying to get through the door. One of the men holding the door shut had been fatally shot. Bleeding uncontrollably, he knew his fate was sealed. He also knew that the longer he kept the door shut, the greater the chances others might live. A few minutes later he slumped over. He was gone.

The bomber tried to force the door open with gunfire, but to no avail. The body of the man fatally shot was wedged tight—ensuring that the door remained closed. The bomber turned back to the windows, which he found garnered him more victims. Every time he fired he would hit someone. The basement was packed with hundreds of worshippers and there was nowhere else to hide.

Omar later remarked, "One thing which I noticed was that upon being hit by a bullet, people would neither wail nor cry. They all took the hits and suffered the agonizing pain with remarkable forbearance. This in my opinion is reflective of their conviction and steadfastness of faith."

Isaac was forced to pause and consider the carnage around him. "Isaac, get ready to die today," he reminded himself. Somehow in the confusion he managed to find his youth group leader. He instructed everyone to move to the back of the hall and move all the plastic chairs in front of them. They moved quickly. A young man came running upstairs as fast as he could and fell on the floor, injured and bleeding. Another followed. Isaac ran to the injured young man and located his wounds. He did his best to administer whatever medical aid he knew. It seemed futile at best.

The sounds of bullets and blasts intensified. While Isaac sat with the injured young man, another came running upstairs with an AK-47 in hand. "Here it comes," Isaac thought to himself. "This is where it ends." But rather than fire, they emptied the gun of its bullets. They were anything but terrorists. They instead worked to ensure that terrorists would not get their hands on another loaded gun.

Isaac and the bleeding young man moved to the offices near the back of the mosque. It had windows to the outside world. They looked, hoping to see help arrive. Instead, they saw cameramen taking videos of terrorists showering the mosque with bullets. Police were nowhere to be found.

Yet another young man arrived. He'd been shot in the stomach and was bleeding uncontrollably. He had little chance of making it without immediate surgery. Right at that moment, Isaac's youth group leader's phone rang.

He reported what he'd learned. "Darul Zikr mosque is also under attack!" Isaac's heart sank. This was a coordinated terrorist attack.

The terror was far from over. A second van had pulled up to the second mosque—Darul Zikr, or "House of Remembrance." An army of terrorists emerged from the van and opened fire immediately. The two men on security were the first martyrs. One terrorist ran through the front and set off the first suicide bomb, blowing himself up along with some half dozen more of the congregation. In the aftermath, police would find three severed heads belonging to suicide bombers.

Waleed, a seventeen-year-old medical student, was among the congregants that day. He was the eldest of four siblings and his parents' only son. Once as a small child, his teacher asked him, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Waleed replied, "I want to be just like my grandfather... A martyr for my faith." Waleed was devout in his attendance to Friday prayer every week—this week was no exception.

Waleed sat and listened quietly to the sermon. A series of blasts and intense gunfire pierced the silence, causing a stir among the congregants. The imam maintained his composure, gently asking everyone to remain calm and engage in prayer. Meanwhile, like a virus, the terrorists began to spread through the mosque.

Waleed called home. His mother answered.

"Mom, I'm at the Darul Zikr mosque, we're under attack. I don't know what's going to happen but they're headed this way right now."

"Under attack? What do you mean?!"

The phone went dead. Waleed had to move. Another suicide blast exploded through the door and into the hall in which he was sitting. Remarkably, no one panicked. People moved calmly and quickly.

While television cameras captured the horror from outside, cell phone footage uploaded to YouTube days after the attack showed the scene from the inside. In the video, dozens of worshippers are huddled in corners, under tables, and flat on the ground. Gunshot wounds and shrapnel leave their marks, and bloodstained clothing is visible on everyone. Gunshots are clearly audible in the background.

The teen recording the video is scared—his voice trembles as he speaks.

"What's happening? Why won't it stop?"

A man in his mid-forties reassures him to have trust in God. At that moment of truth, when each worshipper was in his proverbial foxhole—each maintained their trust in God.

The older man continued, "If it's our time, it's our time. Just pray that God keeps us steadfast." No one wailed, no one screamed. The teen regained his composure.

One person began praying out loud—not for himself, not for his life, not for his family—but for mankind.

"Oh my Lord, send peace on Muhammad and the people of Muhammad, just as you sent peace on Abraham and the people of Abraham. Surely You are the praiseworthy, the glorious. Oh my Lord, send blessings on Muhammad and the people of Muhammad, just as you sent blessings on Abraham and the people of Abraham. Surely You are the praiseworthy, the glorious."

At an area of temporary security, Waleed tried calling his parents again. The phone would work for a minute here, a few seconds there, but never more.

"Waleed, is that you?"

"Yes, Mom, I'm okay, I'm okay. Don't worry, just pray, I'm okay."

"We're watching on television, they're recording all of it. One of them is on the roof, in the minaret, shooting people from his perch. Don't go out in the open! My God, are you okay?!"

"Okay, I won't. But Mom, I'm okay, please don't worry, I promise I'm okay."

Unbeknownst to his parents, Waleed was suffering from a brutal gunshot wound to his leg. Though bleeding profusely, he kept reassuring them he was fine. In truth, the pain in his leg was unbearable. He was constantly on the move, making the pain and bleeding all the worse.

Another loud blast forced Waleed to get off the phone and continue moving through the large mosque. The second suicide bomber had just detonated his vest, taking a dozen or so innocent lives with him while injuring dozens more.

Back at the Baitun Noor mosque, the man shooting through the window came around towards the rear of the building. He squatted fifteen feet away from the rear door to change magazines. He also took out two hand grenades. His clothing was covered in blood—not his own.

Omar watched in horror as the terrorist threw the first grenade. He ran to duck behind a corridor but the grenade seemed to follow him. He lay flat with hands and head away from the terrorist—the grenade came to a rest near his feet. With no time to throw it back, Omar made a mad dash to the opposite wall. His heart racing, his sweat dripping, he made two solid strides before the grenade exploded and sent him flying.

While he miraculously escaped that grenade, General Nasir did not. General Nasir was ninety-one years young. He was a decorated, retired army officer who fought for Pakistan in three separate wars. He avoided capture in foreign lands and he avoided death on the battlefield. He was a war hero who fought valiantly for his nation to defend the lives of millions of Pakistanis. But on May 28, 2010, General Nasir took the full brunt of a grenade blast on his face and chest as he sat in his mosque in Pakistan.

The blast also ripped through the thighs and feet of another nearby person, who happened to be a wing commander in the Pakistani Air Force. He too died instantly. Both men courageously served a country that considered them worthy of death. They loved their country. Their proud military service demonstrated that, despite the persecution, they saw no conflict between being an Ahmadi Muslim and being a Pakistani. After decades of service protecting their countrymen, both died at the hands of the citizens they protected.

The terrorist resumed shooting and came towards the main hall. He lobbed a second grenade. This time Omar wasn't so lucky and the explosion wounded his right foot. He fell flat to the ground and played dead, lying behind an already dead man. Omar's foot burned with unbearable pain. Across the hall he saw the terrorist shoot another man at point-blank range. The man slowly fell to his side and lay motionless.

Omar continued to play dead as the terrorist walked his way. Observing Omar's movement, the terrorist fired in his direction. This was it. This was his moment. Surprisingly, Omar thought not of family or friends or loved ones. He recalled no regrets and regretted no recollections. Rather, he posed a question to God.

"God, is this really the end? All those visions You showed me about the future… Were they just nothing?"

Before God could answer, the terrorist aimed his Kalashnikov at Omar and pulled the trigger. One bullet fired, then a second, then a third.

Television and news agencies were swarming the scene, broadcasting the horror live around the world. From Richmond, Virginia, Ayesha and I watched helplessly as terrorists continued to storm the mosques with little or no resistance. In an editorial the following day, the daily *Dawn* asked, "If television crews can reach the scene of an attack before police reinforcement what does that say about the administration's state of preparedness?"[60]

In Minnesota, it was not long after 5:00 a.m. Haroon's phone rang. Life is such that a call at 5:00 a.m. is hardly ever good news. We've all received that call. We dread answering the phone, hoping and praying that nothing bad happened. Today, it was Haroon's turn to answer that call.

He stumbled out of bed to grab his cell phone on the dresser. A university professor, Haroon was still exhausted from grading final exams as the semester had just ended. Still half asleep, he answered.

"*Asalaamo Alaikum*, hello?"

"Haroon… Is that you?"

"Yes, who is this?"

"Haroon, it's your Auntie Sophia."

He heard a crack in her voice and what sounded like muffled crying.

"Auntie, what's wrong?! What's happened?!"

"We…need you to come to Lahore right away. They're attacking the mosques. Turn on your television."

Haroon's blood ran cold. At least half a dozen members of his family attended those mosques for *Jummah* prayer.

"Who's attacking? What do you know? Is anyone in our family hurt?"

"So far, no one. I think everyone is safe, just please pray. Will you come?"

Haroon breathed a sigh of relief for the moment. He was overcome with emotion and frozen with confusion. "I'm coming," was all he managed to muster. The phone no longer to his ear, he could still hear his Auntie Sophia crying on the phone. A voice from behind him called his name.

"Haroon, is everything okay? Who's that on the phone?"

It was his wife. He took a deep breath but stayed with his back to her.

"Haroon, what is it?" Her voice had turned to a hint of concern.

He turned around slowly and walked back to bed, hanging up the phone. At first, he was unable to speak or look her in the eye. Tears had welled in his.

"I need you to sit up for a moment. I have to tell you something."

In California, it was not long after 3:00 a.m. when I called Muhammed Ahmad Chaudhry. We call him "MAC" for short. Though I'd woken MAC, he answered surprisingly alert, probably anticipating that a call this early in the morning meant something serious.

"I don't know what's happening, MAC, but these goddamn monsters are executing us in Lahore."

While I was losing control, he maintained his characteristically calm demeanor.

"Send me a link… What do you know?"

I sent him the link to the news station broadcasting the attack live.

"Qasim, I need you to focus with me, we have some serious work to get done. I'll call you back in five minutes. Be ready." He hung up. I waited.

Three minutes later my phone rang.

"I just got off the phone with USA headquarters, we're awaiting instructions from London. In the meantime, we need to get a press release together."

So together, helpless and in desperation, we began working on a press release. But, we ran into a problem. Every time we listed the number of casualties, it increased. The first release said twenty casualties. A few minutes later, it jumped to twenty-five. Soon we were at thirty-five casualties, then forty. Finally, MAC decided to draw the line at fifty to send it out, even if we erred on the low side.

It turned out we did—by a lot.

In London, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the Khalifa of Islam and head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, received the report of the attack shortly before he delivered his internationally broadcasted Friday sermon. The attack raged live. His congregants were slaughtered like lambs. Yet, the Khalifa maintained unparalleled composure and dignity. In response to Pakistan's apathy and the Taliban's terror, he proceeded with his Friday sermon and declared:

> The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is a peace-loving true Muslim community. Thus, there will be no improper reaction from any Ahmadi Muslim. Our salvation lies in our supplication to God Almighty and we believe that He has, and always will, help us. The situation in Pakistan is extremely grave. For decades Ahmadi Muslims have not been able to live in peace; in fact, they live their lives in constant danger. In 1974, Ahmadi Muslims were declared non-Muslims by the government of Pakistan and then ten years later the infamous Ordinance XX was adopted, which criminalized all forms of Ahmadi worship and the practice of its faith. These laws effectively legitimized the exclusion and persecution of our community in Pakistan. Ever since, extremists have taken advantage and targeted Ahmadis…[61]

True to the Khalifa's direction and promise, no Ahmadi Muslim responded with violence or any form of indecency.

Back in Lahore, Omar lay motionless. God, it turned out, had already answered Omar's prayer. At point-blank range, the terrorist missed all three shots. And then, for some reason Omar still does not understand, the terrorist just kept on walking.

Meanwhile, my nephew Zakaria also remained in mortal danger. Praying with all his might, and despite his mighty prayers, the terrorist entered the hall in which he hid. As the terrorist scanned the hall, Zakaria came into his line of vision. He raised his gun, aimed, and fired.

Zakaria ran to duck and cover behind a mosque pillar. A bullet screamed through the air and ripped across his back—it was only a flesh wound but his back was quickly soaked in blood. The pain made him crumble to his knees. He was down, but far from out. Thinking Zakaria was fatally injured, the terrorist turned to shoot at others.

The terrorist's attention diverted—this was Zakaria's chance. The timing would need to be perfect but Zakaria could still get out of this alive. There was no room for error. Bleeding but not broken, Zakaria ran with all his might and fast as he could. Just another second was all he needed. Two more steps, one more step. Salvation was a split second away. Zakaria made the final leap with full force and tackled the terrorist, knocking him off balance. He clutched him by the neck with one hand, while grabbing the glowing hot barrel of his gun with the other. The smell of burning flesh filled the air as Zakaria's skin almost immediately melted. He threw down the terrorist and slid his gun across the room, ripping his own skin off. The terrorist attempted to reclaim his gun but Zakaria simply refused to release his neck.

Back in Minnesota, Haroon saw his wife's look of concern turn to a look of horror as he explained what he'd just learned. Before she could react, however, the phone rang again. It was his uncle this time, sounding frantic as he'd ever heard him.

"Haroon, your brother-in-law, Naseem, has been shot. He's being rushed to the hospital; you must come immediately. Please pray that he's spared."

The uncertain fear became an all-too-real fear. Haroon grabbed whatever clothing he could and began packing. His wife, shaken beyond her worst nightmare, tried to gather herself as she called a travel agent to book a flight. She prayed intensely for her brother. Each second seemed to take a minute, each minute an hour. A flight was booked and Haroon drove frantically to the airport. His phone rang. It was his uncle again.

"Hello, Uncle? How's Naseem? How is he?"

His uncle was silent. Haroon could hear muffled crying in the background.

"No, tell me he's okay. Please, God, tell me he's okay."

"Tell your wife, Haroon, that her brother has given his life for his faith. Tell her he didn't suffer."

Zakaria was covered in blood and in extreme pain, but he was still fighting for his life. The terrorist quickly reached for his belly to grab his grenade. Zakaria let go of his neck and pulled at the terrorist's arms. But it wasn't his grenade the terrorist reached for—it was his suicide vest. Bleeding back, burnt hands, and physical exhaustion screamed at Zakaria to stop—but he pushed forward with all his might. As the terrorist reached to detonate his suicide vest, Zakaria pushed yet harder and pulled at his arm. The terrorist was stronger than Zakaria, though, and he inched closer and closer to the bomb's detonator. Knowing full well that he couldn't subdue him permanently on his own, Zakaria screamed for help. He had no more strength to give, but fortunately, he had given just enough.

In the final possible moment before the bomb exploded, two young men came rushing to Zakaria's aid and pinned the terrorist down—spreading his arms out. The terrorist, furious that he did not pull his vest sooner, cursed the 'wrong' kinds of Muslims loudly and repeatedly—

"You're infidels, kafirs, you deserve only death and to burn in hell! Let me go, you infidels! I will kill you!"

The 'wrong' kinds of Muslims didn't respond, and were instead careful to ensure the terrorist wasn't injured. With the greatest care, the

men who came to Zakaria's aid removed the terrorist's grenades, magazines, and suicide vest. Later, Pakistan's interior minister would admit that this was the first time in Pakistani history that a suicide bomber was caught alive.

The entire attack on Baitun Noor lasted forty agonizing minutes. Zakaria was witness to almost every execution that took place that afternoon. Their faces flooding his mind, he rushed home to assure his family that he was alive. Police were nowhere to be found.

While the attack at the Baitun Noor mosque was over, the attack at Darul Zikr raged on. Terrorists stormed Darul Zikr at about 1:40 p.m. Police refused to enter until about 4:10 p.m., giving terrorists two and a half hours to create unabated havoc.

Waleed's phone rang again. This time it was his uncle.

"Where are you, Waleed, can you get out of the mosque? Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine, Uncle. I'm hiding right now and I'm safe. I'm not hurt, don't worry. I think the police should be here any minute now and this whole mess will be over. Just pray, I'm fine."

Waleed knew his fate was bleak, and that his parents and family would worry regardless. The blood loss was taking its toll as Waleed began to feel dizzy. He felt cold, despite the blistering temperatures. But he kept this from his parents. He wanted to become a doctor to alleviate suffering—he wasn't about to cause his family further suffering now.

Back in Richmond, my phone buzzed constantly.

A phone call from MAC in California: "What's the update on the latest death toll?"

"I think it is up to sixty-five now," I replied, fighting back tears.

A text from Salaam in New York: "I can't stop crying. Why the hell won't anyone do anything to stop it?!"

I didn't have an answer.

Another phone call from my brother Tayyib in Cincinnati: "This is horrific. So grateful that no women or children were present in the mosque." He was right. Due to the existing danger of this type of an attack, women and children were asked to not come to the mosque in large congregations like Friday prayer. Had they been present, the death toll would have undoubtedly been in the several hundreds. Yet, this is Pakistan's reality—going to worship services has become a life-or-death dare. In fact, as of this book's publication, female Ahmadi Muslims in

Pakistan have not attended Friday prayer at a mosque in over three years due to the threat of terrorist violence.

Another text from a friend in Chicago: "We need to step up our game—no more being silent when millions in Pakistan are being silenced."

That text struck a nerve. He was right. Whatever we were doing, it wasn't enough. Millions—not just Ahmadi Muslims—but Shias, Hindus, Christians, atheists, and numerous more belief minorities continued to suffer in Pakistan. Their voices are muffled by extremism, intimidation, and societal denial. And the world is unaware of just what atrocities occurred daily behind that veil of oppression, right before their eyes.

Meanwhile, Waleed's parents watched as gunmen continued to pick off worshippers trying to run for cover. Those worshippers that found rooms barricaded themselves inside. The stand-off lasted for hours as the terrorists used every tactic imaginable to gain access—slowly but surely executing worshippers in the process.

"Police have finally arrived at the scene," a field journalist remarked while ducking for cover behind a car. As Ayesha and I watched and waited for the police to enter the mosque, something horrifying happened. The police watched and waited with us. Those worshippers who managed to escape ran to the police to beg them to enter the mosques and stop the attack, but the police merely stood by—refusing to get involved.

The terrorists were running low on ammunition, grenades, and suicide vests. Their one-way trip was drawing to a close. As the gunfire began to wind down, both Waleed and the police thought the ordeal was over.

Nearly eighty lives were taken so far. Waleed phoned home one more time.

"I'm still here, Uncle, please don't worry, I love you—"

The phone went dead. Waleed's father grabbed the phone redialed his son's number, desperately trying to get him, his only son, back on the phone. No one answered.

On the other end, the third suicide bomber ran out of ammunition and grenades, and carried nothing else but his suicide vest. With no one and no police in his way, he pulled the trigger. The blast was powerful and sent a vicious explosion through the mosque. Waleed recalled the answer he gave to his teacher a decade earlier. He recalled his grandfather. His life goal now fulfilled, he had spoken to his family for the last time.

The Aftermath

In the end I, along with millions more worldwide, helplessly watched eighty-six Ahmadi Muslims face brutal murder from eight thousand miles away. Another 124 were injured. An eighty-seventh person was killed as well—a Christian who worked in one of the mosques. Zero police officers lost their lives that day.

When the police finally stormed the mosque, every terrorist was either dead or subdued. The police did nothing more than withhold their services until it was safe for them to enter. In my eyes, they were worse than the terrorists. No one ever expects moral decency out of a terrorist.

But the police—they took an oath to protect the unprotected and serve the underserved. They took an oath to put the lives of their countrymen before their own. But, when it came to the 'wrong' kinds of Muslims, eighty-six lives plus the life of a Christian were not worth risking the life of even one "Muslim" police officer.

It made me think about 9/11 again, and give thanks to the heroic first responders. Of the 2,972 souls who lost their life that day, 403 were police officers, fire fighters, and paramedics. It hardly took them three seconds to respond. But I digress.

The attack made world headlines. "Taliban Attacks Minority Sect in Lahore." CNN, BBC, MSNBC, FOX, Al Jazeera, and countless others reported on the attacks. At about 10:00 a.m. that morning my phone rang—NBC wanted me back to talk about the attack. It was one of the most painful interviews of my life. It was the interview Dean Rahman was unfortunately correct about nine days prior. The interview I wish I never had to give.

The first question was direct and summarized everything I wanted to say.

> **News Anchor**: *Qasim, what have you learned from your family and those in the mosque during this attack?*
>
> **Me**: *We learned something we've known all along. When you have a government that has restricted freedom of expression and freedom of religion, you're essentially creating a breeding ground for these types of extremists to exist in the first place.*

The Lahore attacks were neither accidental nor unpredictable. They were inevitable.

One particular news story shakes me to this very day—an interview of an old man who survived the attack, moments after he escaped the terrorists. The feeble man fought back tears as he spoke, recounting a scene inside the mosque. "I thought they would spare the child…he…was just getting his father some water. They killed his father but I thought they would spare him, the child. But they shot him just the same."

And in the coming days we learned more and more of the reprehensible role the Lahore police played in the attack. It seemed their delayed response had less to do with incompetence, and more to do with malice. The terrorists warned the police of the attacks weeks in advance. Though they knew of the impending attack, the police failed to provide any protection.[62] Instead, they deliberately arrived only several hours afterwards, when the majority of lives were already lost.[63]

Journalist Ismail Khan, in his May 30, 2010, *Dawn* column wrote, "Dozens of police men armed with semi-automatic weapons and guns were seen rushed to the scenes of the blood bath. They were seen huddled together either behind a wall or some other cover, without firing a single bullet. … And then to cap it all the celebratory gunfire by the Lahore police, which has now become their hall mark, every time they finish their job. What was there to celebrate? The death of seventy-nine people?"[64]

ANI, a self-proclaimed terrorist spokesperson proudly declared on May 30: "On the whole, we do like to encourage the nation for increasing such activities, like targeted killings of Qadianis, Shias, the political parties that support them, as well as law enforcing agencies, the Pakistan Army and other racist parties."[65]

But the police's reprehensible role was just the beginning.

We learned that the Punjab Provincial and Pakistan Federal Government also knew of the attack beforehand. Like the police, they too completely ignored the warnings and attack, acting if nothing at all had happened, or that nothing would happen. Human Rights Watch reported that "the anti-Ahmadiyya campaign has intensified in the past year, exemplified by the government allowing groups to place banners seeking the death of 'Qadianis' on the main thoroughfares of Lahore."[66] The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan also reported that it "repeatedly brought the threats [of the attack] to the notice of Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, the provincial government, and the police controlled by the provincial authorities, and that they had asked for enhanced security for Ahmadiyya mosques."[67]

No one listened. And eighty-seven voices were silenced.

Not only did the government completely fail to provide any protection, Zaeem Qadri, an advisor to Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, admitted, "the provincial government had failed to remove threatening banners from the city's thoroughfares in order to prevent 'adverse reaction against the government' by the groups responsible."[68] God forbid a government receive "adverse reaction" for protecting religious freedom.

In short, the Government of Pakistan permitted public banners in Lahore that called for the murder of all Ahmadi Muslims, specifically to avoid a terrorist attack on the government itself. If that doesn't define a failed state, I don't know what does.

In an act of solidarity, former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif called Ahmadi Muslims "his brothers."[69] But this solidarity was short-lived. Only a day later, he recanted his statement after receiving intense public criticism and mullah pressure for such a "blasphemous" comment.[70] But even Sharif's statement was gratuitous. Pakistani President Zardari—a man whose late wife, Benazir Bhutto, was killed in a terrorist attack—refused to acknowledge this attack took place at all. Likewise, Pakistan's Prime Minister Gilani—a man who has the audacity and arrogance to claim that Pakistan champions religious freedom—ignored the attack altogether. Neither by their aides nor by press releases did either condemn or acknowledge the attack.

The only political leader that showed any sincere sympathy was Punjab Governor Salman Taseer. Governor Taseer visited with victims and their families for several hours and vowed to fight for Ahmadi Muslims to have the same freedom of conscience that all Pakistanis had. He vowed to repeal Pakistan's anti-Ahmadi and anti-blasphemy laws.

How sad then, that on January 3, 2011, just seven months after making this vow, Governor Salman Taseer was assassinated at the hands of his own bodyguard, Mumtaz Qadri. Amazingly enough, Qadri assassinated Governor Taseer for fear that he would repeal Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws.

In a tweet hours before his murder, Taseer stated, "I was under huge pressure sure 2 cow down b4 rightest pressure on blasphemy. Refused. Even if I'm the last man standing."[71]

Taseer may in fact have been among the last men standing. In celebration of Taseer's assassination, five hundred clerics in Pakistan declared his death a victory for the country. Lawyers threw rose petals on the assassin, and countless refused to offer Taseer's funeral prayers. In fact, Judge Pervez Ali Shah, who sentenced Qadri to death for his crime, then fled Pakistan after receiving numerous death threats himself.[72] He

simply did not trust that the Pakistani government would be able or willing to protect him. Shabazz Bhatti, Pakistan's then only Christian federal minister, was likewise assassinated for his efforts to repeal Pakistan's blasphemy laws.[73] His death was another tragic blow to freedom in Pakistan.

The police and government's shameless acts notwithstanding, the media joined the party. While the Taliban openly took credit for the attack, the media ran wild with conspiracy theories, instead blaming Ahmadi Muslims.

Shortly after the attack, the media arrived in Rabwah, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's Pakistani headquarters. They sought video of Ahmadi Muslims engaging in street protests and retaliatory violence. Instead, they found only fervent preparations for eighty-six funerals, businesses closed in honor of the deceased, and mosques full of worshippers engaged in deep prayer and reflection.

"When will you retaliate? Where is the street protest going to be? What are you going to set on fire?" the media wanted to know.

As ridiculous as each of those questions sounded, that was the media's expectation. Yet Ahmadi Muslims refused to bite. Frustrated that Ahmadi Muslims refused to respond in violence, the Pakistani media concocted abhorrent propaganda to claim that the Taliban was innocent of any wrongdoing. Instead, the attack was an Ahmadi Muslim "inside job" to gain sympathy for their blasphemous beliefs. How else could anyone explain a perfectly peaceful response? The irony was sickening—Ahmadi Muslims were the 'wrong' kinds of Muslims *because* they were peaceful.

Even in death, my brothers received no honor from Pakistan's majority. A majority, by the way, that remained frighteningly silent throughout. In fact, that deafening silence spread throughout much of the Muslim world, as few Muslim organizations or countries bothered to acknowledge or condemn the attack. One of my colleagues, who then worked at a Muslim-American civil rights organization, informed me months later that his superiors specifically forbade him from condemning the act, being told, "It's their problem, let them deal with it."

The Lahore attacks showed the world in which Pakistani leaders were true champions of human rights and equality, and which were the epitome of hypocrisy. Pakistani journalist and scholar Beena Sarwar again beautifully demonstrated that she is of the former, and spoke valiantly on behalf of Ahmadis and their rights to religious freedom. She has continued to do so since, despite the constant viciousness and vulgarity directed at her as a result. Her example is inspiring and heartwarming. In

the days after the attacks, she wrote, "[We must] stand together against the murder of innocent civilians... It is important to stand together now and in public, even if it is just a few people."[74]

While painfully few have stood together in public, I'm reminded of Margaret Mead's wisdom: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."[75]

Beena Sarwar is not alone. Numerous compassionate, just, and dignified Pakistanis have stood up for the rights of Pakistan's religious minorities. These are incredible people that I encourage everyone reading this book to get to know—journalist Nadeem Paracha, attorney and writer Yaser Latif Hamdani, human rights activist Ali Dayan Hasan, Pakistani-American attorney and human rights activist Asma Uddin, a Kashmiri heritage Pakistani-American community activist Muhammed Malik of Florida, Pakistani journalist Ayesha Tanzeem, and Asma Jehangir (who has even been "accused" of being a Qadiani for her advocacy of minority rights).

Pakistan's ambassador to the United States (2011-2013), her Excellency Sherry Rehman, made a sincere push in 2010 to remove the death penalty provision in Pakistan's blasphemy laws. While her revision was not an outright repeal, it was certainly a step in the right direction. Only months later, Salman Taseer and Shabazz Bhatti were assassinated for their attempts to repeal blasphemy laws. Rehman began to receive an increasing number of death threats as well. By February 2011, Rehman was sadly forced to retract her proposed amendment. Not two years later, Pakistan shockingly charged her with blasphemy—their own ambassador to the United States. In May, 2013 Ambassador Rehman personally invited me to her farewell party at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington D.C. I availed the opportunity to thank her in person for her efforts to champion minority rights, and conveyed my sincere hope that she continue her work to return Pakistan to its founding ideals of freedom of conscience. She assured me she would work to her fullest capacity.

And while there are several more I can add to this list, the simple fact is that the world needs many more such champions before change becomes reality. In the meantime, minorities in Pakistan will continue to suffer through easily preventable suffering. The Lahore attacks could have been prevented in any number of ways. So many "ifs" remain. If the police had simply done their job, they would have thwarted the Taliban attack weeks in advance. If the government had done its job, they would have forbidden billboards calling for the murder of Ahmadi Muslims. If the media had done its job, it would have condemned the attack, and

therefore exposed extremism for the evil it is. And if Pakistan's silent majority hadn't been silent, then future attacks would not have been tolerated.

None of those "ifs" happened. The police remain apathetic, the government remains in denial, the media remains aloof from reality, and the silent majority feeds its own destruction.

The terrorists may have been successful in taking life, but in their foolish attempt, they failed to deter the 'wrong' kinds of Muslims from their practice of Islam. The terrorists did nothing more than prove who were the wrong kinds of Muslims. Were they the ones shooting the bullets or the ones responding with peace?

Eighty-six gave their lives to prove this point—but sadly, in the years since the attack, it seems few in Pakistan listened. Instead, the Lahore attack inspired other extremists, and within forty-eight hours, two more Ahmadi Muslims were murdered because of their faith. Dozens more have been murdered in the three years since, and the "ifs" yet remain.

Hours after the attack, Adam approached his mother and spoke the most difficult words that ever escaped his lips. "Father was martyred." The new widow wept but reminded herself to remain firm and patient. She was numb from the pain and tears.

Isaac left Pakistan but three months later. The suffocation, the frustration, the devastation of living in a nation that had marked him for death was unbearable. But the post-traumatic stress has taken its toll—even a loud "bang" now leaves him shaken and anxious. The physical scars may have healed, but the mental scars will long remain.

Samar was set to leave Pakistan just two days after the Lahore attack. His purpose in leaving was precisely because the persecution of Ahmadi Muslims had reached a point of climax—beyond what any human should ever have to bear. He now resides in another country as a successful businessman.

Omar is alive, and praying for the day he is no longer a target in Pakistan simply because of his faith.

Zakaria, my nephew, spent the next year and a half in hiding. Word got out that he'd single-handedly stopped a suicide bomber. Zakaria—a then twenty-year-old who stood 5 feet 4 inches and weighed 115 pounds—stopped a suicide bomber. Dozens of combat-trained police wearing helmets and bulletproof vests, standing over six feet tall and carrying pistols and rifles, could not match the courage of one young man who refused to cower in the face of mortal danger. And those same

cowardly policemen did nothing to protect Zakaria even after he heroically captured the suicide bomber.

After all, the captured suicide bomber was not actually charged. Despite slaughtering people in daylight in front of television cameras, he has not been convicted of any crime, let alone punished. Zakaria, meanwhile, was a marked man. He had to drop out of school and left home only when absolutely necessary. He realized life in Pakistan was no longer possible. Fortunately, his asylum case to another nation was recently accepted. Though the horror of that day haunts him still, he has picked up the pieces and continued his life, dedicated to the service of humanity and the promotion of peace—without terrorist interference.

Waleed rests peacefully, having returned to his Creator.

At least four million Ahmadi Muslims live in constant threat in Pakistan. A term now commonly used to describe Pakistani Ahmadi Muslims is *wajib ul qatl*, or "worthy of death." And for too many people, that's okay, because Qadianis are simply the wrong kinds of Muslim.

As the sun set in Lahore on May 28, 2010, two men from Rabwah arrived—one to Baitun Noor mosque and one to Darul Zikr Mosque. Amidst eighty-six empty pairs of shoes, blood-splattered floors, and walls scarred from gunfire and suicide blasts, they stood in complete submission, facing Mecca. "*Iqamat*," they each called out in their respective mosques. With the sun now set, it was time for *Maghrib* prayer. These were mosques. They were made for the worship of God. It was prayer time—terrorists be damned. The 'wrong' kinds of Muslims chose one of the hundreds of ways to kneel face down on the ground and worship God.

Fortunately, no terrorists showed up this time. And like before, police were nowhere to be found.

19

Winning the Hearts

"*We try to win the hearts.*" — Mirza Nasir Ahmad

By now, he had it down to a science. Dr. Saleem, a seasoned heart surgeon, left his home in a Pennsylvania suburb with enough time to make it to Baltimore Washington International Airport. He made his way through airport security and soon found his gate. A few minutes later, he boarded his flight to Lahore, Pakistan. He was headed to Tahir Heart Institute. For the next month he would use his world-class training, experience, and medical knowledge to provide free medical assistance to anyone who needed it. This is a trip he's made countless times. Whether the patient was Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, atheist—didn't matter. He would do whatever he could to provide the most complex surgeries and consultations to anyone of any faith and anyone of no faith—free of charge. Remember Yusef, the Mong attack victim whom I met weeks after in the hospital? Today he is alive and able to live an able life because of the sacrifices of those like Dr. Saleem.

It is a sacrifice Dr. Saleem's late father—a martyr—would have wanted.

But why is this important?

One rainy Sunday morning over coffee with my wife and dear friend Roberta Sachs, Roberta and Ayesha had an epiphany. Aside from mere awareness of persecution in Pakistan and around the world, what do I want my readers to do once they've read this book? After all, ending the book on the murder of 87 innocent souls isn't exactly ending on a high note. Well, now comes the true test of whether I've adequately convinced you to take action to create that positive future.

Here are the three practical actions every person can take to create that positive future for those oppressed in Pakistan, and worldwide: support, educate, and win.

First, *support* those supporting victims of terrorism, oppression, and poverty. While there are countless ways to do this, I provide two opportunities I hope everyone embraces. Dr. Saleem is a real person, but for security reasons Saleem is not his real name. He was only a year old when his father was martyred. But like countless Ahmadi Muslim doctors around the world, he makes the regular trip to Ahmadi-run hospitals in Pakistan, India, Ghana, Nigeria, and numerous other nations to provide free medical aid to anyone and everyone. Every trip is another risk. Should extremists discover that an Ahmadi doctor is traveling to Pakistan, the doctor's life would be in immediate danger. Still, Dr. Saleem has made this trip countless times, and has no plans of stopping. Service to humanity supersedes self-preservation.

But their time, expertise, and surgeries—provided free of charge—are only part of the costs associated with medical treatment. Though these physicians graciously waive their fees, necessities like supplies, facilities, and medical transport are unavoidable costs.

Thus, this is the first step. Contribute to the Tahir Heart Institute. Whatever your skill, whatever your trade, you can contribute to support those who serve the oppressed. I am a lawyer, not a doctor, but I contribute for the sole purpose of service to humanity. Links to the Tahir Heart Institute are available on my website: www.qasimrashid.com.

Likewise, support those suffering by raising your voice to your respective nation's leaders, the United Nations, and to Pakistan. On my website I have drafted completed letters demanding equal voting rights for all of Pakistan's religious minorities, protection for all Pakistan's religious minorities against terrorism, and a repeal to Pakistan's barbaric blasphemy laws. All you need to do is visit, submit your name and information, and hit "send." I believe in setting goals to measure success, and I challenge my readers to help surpass the one-million letters mark. That is, one million letters to speak up for the millions of oppressed and suffering in Pakistan.

Second, we must *educate*. As much as I try, I cannot forget that episode of bullying as a young child on the school bus. Its memory is not scarred on my mind because I was bullied, but because I've since understood what such intolerance ultimately leads to. Wars between nations do not begin because its people behaved with too much civility towards one another. The precursor for violence is never mutual respect. Every world conflict—large or small—begins with that destructive combination of ignorance and fear. Add a dash of arrogance and violence is inevitable.

The antidote, therefore, is education and compassion. Education combats the ignorance, and compassion melts away fear. Such an environment transforms arrogance into lasting friendship. But the struggle to achieve that friendship is rarely easy—especially in a world where "might is right" has dominated for so long.

Education is the key to Pakistan's salvation, and to the world's salvation. For this book is just one story, my story. And it is a story too few have heard. By reading this book, you have already begun to turn the tide with yourself. I invite you to advance and become a leader for your family and your friends. Share this book, this story of the 'wrong' kind of Muslim, with them and encourage them to share it with others.

Educate your circle of influence on the facts. Pew reports that nearly 70 percent of the world lives under some form of oppression of conscience.[76] That amounts to 5.25 billion human beings, oppressed only because of their personal beliefs. You have read but one story, and well over five billion stories remain. This staggering number means that in the twenty-first century, when allegedly the most advanced species on Earth is enjoying its most advanced era of existence, the vast majority of us are living under the proverbial—or literal—gun. We are losing the fight for freedom.

Everything you've read in this book is a result of this Jihad—my Jihad—of the pen. Pakistan has become what it has become because the Jihad its leadership has chosen—the Jihad of the sword—is one alien to Islam, human decency, and common sense. So few (Muslims and non-Muslims) realize the true meaning of Jihad. It is not holy war, but struggle—the struggle against evil, against the urge to commit evil, and against tyranny and oppression.

It is no exaggeration to say that mankind's future depends on this battle—the sword versus the pen. The former wins territories and bends heads, but the latter wins hearts and convinces minds. The former is temporary, and the latter is lasting. In this battle, people of all colors, shapes, sizes, and creeds must choose that pen. This is the only way to peace.

A week prior to the Lahore attacks, I condemned Faisal Shahzad's attempted Times Square bombing. That was my Jihad—intellectual discourse.

Faisal Shahzad received his training from the Pakistani Tehreek-e-Taliban—the same Taliban group that launched the Lahore attacks. That was their Jihad—violence. The terrorists that trained Faisal Shahzad to kill innocent Americans were the same Lahore-attack terrorists that killed innocent Pakistanis. Unless and until our pen—via education,

compassion, tolerance, and pluralism—outdoes the extremists' sword, those like Shahzad will continue to thrive.

To cure any disease or illness, we must recognize that it exists. We cannot cure what we do not acknowledge. Pakistan continues to suffer because its leadership and enough Pakistanis refuse to recognize that blasphemy laws are the cancer that chokes its existence. The first step to cure this illness is simple: awareness. Yet awareness is arguably the most difficult step because it forces us out of our comfort zones. It is frightening, even suffocating. When I was a fifteen-year-old deli clerk with an evangelical manager, being aware of the fact that I did not know what I believed was uncomfortable enough. It became that much more frightening when my father refused to "help" me, but made me help myself and learn on my own. Several agents and publishers rejected this book because concerns over backlash pushed them out of their comfort zones. What irony that a book that seeks to give voice to those intimidated into silence is itself silenced.

And this is where your voice comes in.

Too many people who can make a difference do not, simply because they are in a comfort zone, unaware of the suffering of billions worldwide. We must create an awareness the world has never before witnessed. We must continue to convey this message that countless fellow human beings suffer under the most brutal forms of oppression of conscience. Before any steps to blasphemy-law repeal, voting rights restoration, equal access to employment and education, and freedom from terrorism even become possible—we must tell the world this horrific oppression of conscience exists. The world cannot cure oppression of conscience until it acknowledges its existence. We must work together to educate.

Things must change if we hope to make it to a prosperous twenty-second century. We must change. We must write the narrative of the future with the Jihad of the pen.

Thus, third, we must do so by *winning* hearts.

So how do we win the hearts?

It is something my father taught me years ago, and something my son reminded me of once again. I came home one October afternoon in 2012 to find my then three-year-old quite upset. Arms crossed, pouty face, and lips pursed, he sat alone on the couch. His bright brown eyes were staring at the wall.

"What's wrong, Hassan?"

"Abbu, I'm sad."

Intrigued, I asked the obvious, "Well, why are you sad?" I expected something about a toy or not having enough ice cream.

Hassan stood up. "Because, the mullah hurt Malala."

"Wait, who did what?"

"Malala's hurt, Abbu, she's hurt. And mullah is bad."

Hassan was referring to Malala Yousafzai, a young Pakistani education advocate. The Taliban near fatally shot her on October 9, 2012, because she advocated for women's education.[77] Hassan was clearly upset.

"It's okay, Son. She'll pull through; just pray for her and we'll keep working hard."

Hassan put his hands to his face and after a few moments yelled out, "Amen!"

I smiled, and Hassan continued, "Is Malala okay now, Abbu?"

I'm always amazed how well children can simplify the most complex situations.

"She will be, Son, she will be."

Malala thankfully did recover and has continued her noble mission to champion girls' education. *TIME Magazine* ranked her second for the 2012 "Person of the Year" award.[78] She's been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize,[79] and in 2013, won the Simone de Beauvoir Prize[80]—a prestigious human rights award. No doubt she has gained the world's respect.

But Malala is not respected because she is a scholar, or wealthy, or a celebrity. Instead, she is respected because she did something that transcends time, culture, and religion—she won the world's heart. She courageously waged her Jihad of the pen against the Taliban's Jihad of the sword—and she won. She has written the narrative on Islam, on human rights, on women's education, and on freedom of conscience. She has defined the true meaning of Jihad as a struggle against evil—and she won. Not just in principle, but in practice. She won the world's heart.

I find myself constantly returning to that original question: Why live such a life of difficulty when we can live peacefully, privately, and watch our children grow up? And every time the resounding answer stares me in the face: peace cannot exist anywhere on Earth unless freedom of conscience exists everywhere on Earth. We cannot live our lives in fear and ignorance of the other, in fear of what we do not understand. No human being should be feared—we are all equals. Our struggle must not be confined to a certain time or place. Rather, it must transcend religion, nationality, gender, and race to truly have the global impact necessary to conquer the sword.

The time to act is not now, it was decades ago. We have untold catching up to do.

So, do not let the perceived comfort we all enjoy prevent us from speaking out for the billions oppressed. Do not be intimidated. If all you do after reading this book is convey to your circle of influence that oppression of conscience exists and you are fighting to end it—then you have begun to give voice to the billions oppressed. So do your part. Wage your Jihad. State your claim—in your future and your children's future. Write the narrative of your faith, of your beliefs, of your purpose. I assure you, no Muslim received a call from the 9/11 terrorists asking permission to fly planes into buildings in the name of Islam. No Christian received a call from Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army asking permission to maim, rape, and kill tens of thousands of women and children in the name of Christianity. No Jew received a call from Baruch Goldstein asking permission to commit the Cave of the Patriarchs massacre in the name of Judaism. No atheist received a call from the Tamil Tigers (a secular terrorist group) before they perfected suicide bombing, killing tens of thousands in the name of secularist extremism.

No, each of these terrorists waged their sword and wrote the narrative that they wanted the world to hear. They didn't give a damn what anyone else in the world thought. We, the world, must stop waiting for permission to write our narrative, and write our narratives already.

This book is a call for a new future. One that champions education, service to humanity, and human equality and dignity. One that champions freedom of conscience for all people of all faiths, and for all people of no faith.

Whatever nation you're in, whatever city—because of the efforts of a man in a small village in rural India, your life has changed. Reflect on your influence and likewise, change the lives of those around you. As the 'wrong' kind of Muslim, this is the true Jihad to which I invite you—one that wins the hearts and minds. And if I've won your heart and your mind today, then share this story, my story, with those whom you care about. Give a voice to the millions silenced in Pakistan, and the billions silenced worldwide. And likewise, let your voice be heard. Tell your story. Go and fight intolerance with tolerance, apathy with education, and fear with compassion. Do what we all must to create for mankind the future we all want. Support those supporting victims of terrorism, educate your circle and share this story, and by all means let nothing on Earth stop you from what is *most* important—

Win the hearts.

Epilogue

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, Nothing is going to get better, it's not." — Dr. Seuss

I often reflect and marvel at the worldwide impact one individual can make. No one alive today knew that pompous young man in 1931. Who laid on what seemed like his deathbed. No one was around to hear him make a final prayer for life and health. No one today saw his struggle, his Jihad to find his peace.

Yet every one of you today is reading this book because of a decision Mian Sirajudeen made the better part of a century ago. He embraced his struggle to learn with a free mind and let no one else dictate his future. He cared a whole awful lot, and he has changed the world.

I hope that when you take action, you share your story. I am here to help you raise your voice and share your story with the world. Follow me on Twitter @MuslimIQ and email me your story at q.rashid@richmond.edu. I want to share your story from whatever corner of the world you are in, to every corner of the world there is. This 'wrong' kind of Muslim looks forward to changing the world with you, the 'wrong' kind of agnostic, atheist, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jew, _____.

Let us begin.

With peace.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to God Almighty for His strength, patience, and opportunity to write *The Wrong Kind of Muslim*. After God, I thank His Holy Prophet, the Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad Mustafa[sa] and his servant the Messiah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad[as]. My eternal gratitude to His Holiness, Mirza Masroor Ahmad[aba], Khalifa of Islam and worldwide head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. He is a beacon of peace, a courageous lion in the face of intolerance, and a model of compassion. Despite His Holiness' overwhelming obligations, he graciously sacrificed his time, blessed prayers, and personal attention in a manner beyond anything I deserved. May God continue to strengthen His Holiness' hands, Amen.

I cannot say enough about my angelic wife, Ayesha. Her support, encouragement, wisdom, edits, and compassion were unmatched. She witnessed my daily struggle and frustration and responded with solutions and comfort. She recognized my countless shortcomings and became the ironclad bridge to overcome them. She ensured that the festering idea deep in my mind became the successful book it is today. If I have achieved any success, it is because of her. She is my strength.

My wonderful and young sons Hassan and Hashim sacrificed immensely. Their father, who should've been playing with them, feeding them, and reading to them, was instead constantly buried in his Mac. May my children be blessed to become relentless servants of humanity and ardent lovers of God. And to quote Dr. Atif Mian, I pray when they finally read *The Wrong Kind of Muslim*, it is a book of ancient history, not of current reality.

My parents and siblings, and especially my respected father, Missionary Abdur Rashid Yahya, Vice Principal of Ahmadiyya Institute for Islamic Studies in Toronto, and brothers, Tayyib Mubarak Rashid and Ahmad Rashid, graciously sacrificed with their time, prayers, and edits. Their loving motivation and insightful guidance was a godsend. My loving uncle Bashir Ahmad Ahsan was a wealth of knowledge, insight, and understanding. I cannot thank him enough for his contributions. My love to my family and friends in Pakistan who intimately contributed to this book, yet for safety reasons cannot be named.

My special appreciation to those who courageously shared their stories with me, and therefore with the world. Their courage to speak up and give voice to the silenced is nothing short of inspirational. May their voices reach the corners of the earth.

The following list is not exhaustive, and in no particular order, but it represents some of the many people who made this book possible, either through direct insight, or through priceless friendship and/or mentoring:

Muhammed Ahmad Chaudhry, Sardar Anees Ahmad, Salaam Bhatti, Esq., Alex Navarro, Senator Tim Kaine, Professor Philip Jenkins, Beena Sarwar, Professor John Farina, Naveed Malik, Dr. Nasim Rehmatullah, Erik Cuchna, Hafiz Imran Ahmad, Mamoona Sadia, Rabbi Marla Joy Subeck Spanjer, Dr. Atif Mian, Carol Rick Gibbons, Rabia Chaudhry, Kaashif Qaderi, Abdul Karim, the late Muhaimin Karim Shaheed, the late Sultan Abdul Latif, my late Uncle Muhammad Shafi, Roger Hseih, Bill Daum, Olisa Ojeh, Imam Azhar Haneef, Amjad Mahmood Khan, Esq., Micah Taair, my late Aunt Sakina, Dr. Faheem Younus Qureshi, Bilal Rana, Maham Khan, Sam Freedman, Sohail Mirza, Daud Chaudry, Mahmood Khalid, Dr. Sohail Husain, Salman Sajid, Alia Sajid, Roberta Oster Sachs, Oscar Del Bosque, Susie Horn, Heather Wake, Marco Coti, Lara Tokarz, Nusrat Jehan Qadir, Absar Alan, Mohsin Amjed, Rashid Ahmad American, Alhaj Dhul-Waqar Yaqub, Abid Haneef, Dr. Saheed Timehin, Professor Carl Tobias, Dean Michelle Rahman, Professor Jonathan Stubbs, Dean Wendy Perdue, Dean Clark Williams, Dean Kristine Henderson, the late Professor John F. Carroll, the late Judy Meyer, Mary Caudill, Professor John Douglass, Brandon Jaycox, Davy Crumplar, Amy Weiss, Luke Rooney, William Warwick, Ryan Huffman, Jennifer Sykes, and the entire Richmond Law Class of 2012, Faculty, and Staff (Go Spiders!), Andy Preuss, the Teague family, the Vandenend family, Lamorne Morris, Robert Salaam, Amaar Ahmad, Hadi Ahmad, Mahershala Ali, Danny Armstrong, Sherrie Harrington, Imran Hayee, Abdur Rahim Hubbs, Muhammed Owusu, Mick Sladic, Hamza Illyas, Saad Karamat, Dr. Waseem Sayed, Tony Westin, Junaid Latif, Daud Ahmad, Rizwan Ahmad, Erfan Ahmad, Dr. Kashif Nadeem Chaudhry, Rizwan Alladin, Shukoor Ahmed, Munam Naeem, Sharjeel Sajid, Thomas Raper, Professor John Moeser, Reverend Craig Kocher, Emily Cobb, Asghar Goraya, Masood Tahir, Brendan Ellis, Imam Naseem Mahdi, Wasim Malik, Dr. Ahsan Khan, Dr. Arshad Khan, and my Kickstarter backers.

My prayers, love, and unending appreciation to my family's first Wrong Kind of Muslims: Mian Sirajudeen, my hero I never met, and Rehmat Khatoon, my heroine I hardly knew. Their struggle, sacrifice, and unrelenting pursuit of freedom of conscience are the catalysts that won my heart and compelled me to write. May God keep them blessed, Amen.

Last but not least, I am grateful to you, the reader. Thank you for your time, compassion, and trust that this book was worth the investment. You are giving voice to the voiceless. Never stop. Here's to our continued journey together to support, educate, and win the hearts.

Qasim Rashid, Esq.
Richmond, Virginia, USA
June 3, 2013

Dedications

This page recognizes my earliest supporters. At a time when I literally had no funds to complete this book, these wonderful human beings provided such generous support that I was left literally speechless. I happen to personally know that several contributed as students, single parents, and on fixed incomes. In just thirty days, my backers helped raise over fifteen thousand dollars. It was then one of the top ten all-time raised for a non-fiction book on Kickstarter.com. A most beautiful characteristic about my supporters is the wide array of beliefs they represent—agnostic, atheist, various Christian and Muslim sects, Jews, Hindus, and the list goes on. These noble people demonstrate that despite our faith differences, we can all unite for the common cause that is universal freedom of conscience. I beg forgiveness of those supporters not mentioned. Mentioned or not, I am immensely grateful to each of you.

$1500+ Platinum Club

Two generous supporters each contributed fifteen hundred dollars and each asked to remain anonymous. Both of these supporters were among the earliest contributors. I did not then know either personally and am especially grateful for their trust in this book's mission and purpose.

$500+ Gold Club

Ahsan M. Khan; Anonymous

$247+ Silver Club

Alam Ali; Irfan A. Alladin; Maudood Bhatti; Ahmad Chaudhry; Kamran & Mahjabeen Khan; Fwad Malik; Mamoon; Bilal Rana; Tayyib Rashid; Manahil Shahnawaz; Jennifer Sykes; Anonymous

A special appreciation goes to my dear friend Sharon Aldridge Kaufman. Sharon was a devout Christian. She was a humble, beautiful woman with a heart of gold. Though on a fixed income, Sharon earnestly contributed whatever she could. My painful regret is that I could not complete this book before Sharon returned to her Maker on February 9, 2013. May she rest in peace. From God we are and to God must we return.

About the Author

Qasim Rashid, Esq. was born in Rawalpindi, Pakistan on July 21, 1982. He and his family migrated to the United States in 1987, and after a short stint in Washington, D.C., moved to Chicago the following year. In Chicago, Qasim completed his grammar school, high school, and undergraduate studies—completing his Bachelor's of Science in Marketing from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2006. After working since the early 2000s in the telecommunications and education sectors, Qasim pursued and received his *juris doctorate* from the University of Richmond School of Law in 2012. Qasim's other childhood passion is running, and he is an avid runner to this day.

Today, Qasim is a practicing attorney in Richmond, Virginia, where he resides with his wife and two children. He dreams of one day walking on another planet.

References

Introduction

[1] Shahla Khan Salter, "Saving Rimsha: Religious Intolerance is the Real Blasphemy," *The Huffington Post*, August 29, 2012 (12:00 a.m.), http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/shahla-khan-salter/downs-syndrome-girl-death_b_1834667.html.

[2] Richard Leiby and Michele Langevine Leiby, "Taliban says it shot Pakistani teen for advocating girls' rights," *The Washington Post*, October 9, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/taliban-says-it-shot-infidel-pakistani-teen-for-advocating-girls-rights/2012/10/09/29715632-1214-11e2-9a39-1f5a7f6fe945_story.html.

[3] Dean Nelson, "Christian boy tortured and killed in Pakistan," *The Telegraph*, August 23, 2012, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/9495451/Christian-boy-tortured-and-killed-in-Pakistan.html.

[4] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom" (report, Washington, DC: 2011), 114-115.

[5] Muhammad Sadaqat, "19 pulled off buses, shot dead in sectarian hit," *The Express Tribune*, August 17, 2012, http://tribune.com.pk/story/423256/19-pulled-off-buses-shot-dead-in-sectarian-hit/.

Chapter 4: The Wrong Kind of Muslim

[6] Faisal, "The Two Faces of Maududi," *Al Spittoon* (blog), June 28, 2010, http://www.spittoon.org/archives/6885.

[7] Arkansas Forest Resources Center, "Some Memorable Quotations on Education and Knowledge," *Arkansas Forest Resources Center*, http://www.afrc.uamont.edu/ficklinr/quotes.pdf.

[8] S. Abul A'la Maududi, *Jihad in Islam* (Beirut, Lebanon: The Holy Koran Publishing House, 2006).

[9] Hadrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *A Message of Peace*, trans. Team of Lajna Ima'illah, UK (Tilford, Surrey: Islam International Publications Ltd., 1968), 6, http://www.alislam.org/library/browse/volume/Ruhani_Khazain/book/Paigham_e_Sulha/?l=English#page/6/mode/1up.

[10] Philip Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 129.

[11] David Corn, "McCain's Spiritual Guide: Destroy Islam," *Mother Jones*, March 12, 2008, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2008/03/mccains-spiritual-guide-destroy-islam.

[12] "AJC Criticizes Rev. Pat Robertson for Comments Denigrating Islam" (press release, November 13, 2002), *AJC*, http://www.ajc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=7oJILSPwFfJSG&b=8479733&ct=12482391.

[13] CNN Wire Staff, "Graham disinvited from prayer event over Islam comments," *CNN*, April 23, 2010 (3:16 a.m.), http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/04/23/graham.islam.controversy/index.html.

[14] Ali Gharib, "UPDATED With Audio: Rick Santorum's Islamophobia Problem," *ThinkProgress*, January 5, 2012 (5:33 p.m.),

http://thinkprogress.org/security/2012/01/05/398688/santorum-islam-eradicate/?mobile=nc.

Chapter 5: The War Within

[15] "Mr. Jinnah's presidential address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan" (August 11, 1947), Pakistani.org, http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/constituent_address_11aug1947.html.

[16] Muhammad Ali Jinnah, President of Pakistan, "Broadcast Talk to the United States of America on Pakistan" (February 1948), *Jinnah.pk*, http://www.jinnah.pk/2009/09/pakistan-and-her-people-ii/.

[17] Wali Khan, *Facts are Facts: The Untold Story of India's Partition* (New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House, 1987), 40–42.

Chapter 6: Into the Darkness

[18] BBC News, "Q&A: The Muhammad cartoons row," *BBC News*, last updated February 7, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4677976.stm.

[19] Rabia Mehmood, "Silence resonates after Ahmadi graves' vandalized," *The Express Tribune*, December 10, 2012, http://tribune.com.pk/story/477541/violation-of-minority-rights-silence-resonates-after-ahmadi-graves-vandalised/.

[20] Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: South Asia: Pakistan," *CIA*, last modified April 16, 2013, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html.

Chapter 7: Pakistan's Hope

[21] "History of persecution 1971 to 1980," *ThePersecution.org*, March 10, 2004, http://www.thepersecution.org/facts/h71-80.html.

[22] Ibid.

Chapter 9: Exporting Extremism

[23] David O'Reilly, "U.S. citizen slain over his religion in his native Pakistan" (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*), *ThePersecution.org*, August 25, 2010, http://www.thepersecution.org/news/10/pi0825.html.

[24] "Report on the Situation of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan," *ThePersecution.org*, last modified November 21, 1995, http://www.thepersecution.org/archive/ordxx.html.

[25] Rana Tanveer, "Ahmadi shot, injured on 'Khatam-e-Nabuwat Day,'" *The Express Tribune*, September 8, 2011, http://tribune.com.pk/story/247482/ahmedi-shot-injured-on-khatam-e-nabuwat-day/.

Chapter 10: The ~~Moral~~ Dictator

[26] "NBC Interview on Ahmadiyya Mosque Attack in Lahore, Pakistan," *YouTube*, May 28, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BR2-ZD9DlpE.

[27] *Life of Brian*, directed by Terry Jones (1979; Irvington, NY: Criterion Collection, 1999), DVD.

[28] "Report on the Situation of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan: Section 295C Pakistan Criminal Code," *ThePersecution.org*, last modified November 4, 1994, http://www.thepersecution.org/archive/10_c.html.

[29] "PAKISTAN: More Muslim than the Muslims," *Asian Human Rights Commission*,

March 2, 2012, http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-ART-017-2012.
[30] CNN Wire, "Election results 2012: Voter turnout lower than 2008 and 2004, report says," *ABC15.com*, November 8, 2012, http://www.abc15.com/dpp/news/national/election-results-2012-voter-turnout-lower-than-2008-and-2004-report-says.
[31] Susan Page, "Why 90 million Americans won't vote in November," *USA Today*, August 15, 2012, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politics/story/2012-08-15/non-voters-obama-romney/57055184/1.

Chapter 12: The World's Strongest Dentures
[32] "4th Khalifa and Divine Warning about Zia's Destruction," *YouTube*, October 16, 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18syda7ZszU.
[33] "Mirza Tahir Ahmad's Warning to General Zia ul Haq (Aug 12 1988)," *YouTube*, August 17, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LncNhm0TBH8.
[34] Elaine Sciolino, "Zia of Pakistan Killed as Blast Downs Plane; U.S. Envoy, 28 Others Die," *New York Times*, August 18, 1988, http://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/18/world/zia-of-pakistan-killed-as-blast-downs-plane-us-envoy-28-others-die.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm.

Chapter 13: Shia Suffering and Horrors Hindus Face
[35] "HRCP: Majority of Sectarian Attacks in Pakistan are on Shia," *ShiaPAC*, April 5, 2010, http://www.shiapac.org/2013/04/05/hrcp-majority-of-sectarian-attacks-in-pakistan-are-on-shia/.
[36] "Massacre in Quetta provides damning indictment of authorities: HRW," *Dawn.com*, January 11, 2013, http://dawn.com/2013/01/11/massacre-of-shia-in-quetta-provides-damning-indictment-of-pakistani-authorities-hrw/.
[37] "Hindus in Sindh attacked after boy drinks from mosque cooler," *The Times of India*, July 13, 2010 (1:38 a.m.), http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-07-13/pakistan/28316354_1_hindu-families-hindu-man-sindh.
[38] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "114.
[39] Ibid., 114-115.
[40] "Secularism in Pakistan," *Wikipedia*, last modified April 8, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularism_in_Pakistan.
[41] Kashif Hussain, "A tale of migrating Hindus," *Daily Times*, August 20, 2010, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2012%5C08%5C20%5Cstory_20-8-2012_pg7_10.
[42] M Ilyas Khan, "Razed temple highlights Pakistan Hindu woes," *BBC News South Asia*, December 4, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-20582988.

Chapter 14: The Sixth Night
[43] Shamsul Isam and Abdul Manan, "In police custody: Ahmadi schoolteacher 'tortured to death,'" *The Express Tribune*, April 1, 2012, http://tribune.com.pk/story/358137/in-police-custody-ahmadi-schoolteacher-tortured-to-death/.
[44] "Mirza Ghulam Qadir Ahmad Sahib, Rabwah, Pakistan," *ThePersecution.org*, last modified March 10, 2004, http://www.thepersecution.org/photo/shaheed/ghulam_qadir.html.

[45] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom," 114.
[46] Ibid., 116.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 114-115.

Chapter 16: Brain Drain
[49] Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: South Asia: Pakistan."
[50] "Award of an Ahmadi Muslim Girl from Rabwah Pakistan, Sitara Burooj Akbar O-Level," *Al Islam*, http://www.alislam.org/v/1904.html.
[51] "List of Martyres," *ThePersecution.org*, last modified January 1, 2012, http://www.thepersecution.org/facts/martyred.html.
[52] "THAILAND: Authorities release Ahmadi refugees," *IRIN*, June 6, 2011, http://www.irinnews.org/Report/92899/THAILAND-Authorities-release-Ahmadi-refugees.
[53] Irfan Husain, "Faith in decline," *Dawn.com*, August 27, 2012, http://dawn.com/2012/08/27/faith-in-decline/.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ghaffar Hussain, "The rise of atheism in Pakistan," *The Commentator*, January 9, 2012, http://www.thecommentator.com/article/782/the_rise_of_atheism_in_pakistan.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Maulana Siraj Ahmad Dinpuri, Karachi, January 9, 1989.
[58] Faizan Kanji, "In our PM's words: And why don't they leave then?", *The Express Tribune* (blog), May 12, 2012, http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/11586/in-our-pms-words-and-why-dont-they-leave-then/.
[59] Ibid.

Chapter 18: The Eighty-Six
[60] "Monthly Newsreport – May, 2010," *ThePersecution.org*, May 28, 2010, http://www.thepersecution.org/nr/2010/may.html.
[61] Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat International, "Terrorist attacks on Ahmadi Mosques in Pakistan" (press release, London, May 28, 2010), http://www.alislam.org/egazette/press-release/terrorist-attacks-on-ahmadi-mosques-in-pakistan/.
[62] "Pakistan: Massacre of Minority Ahmadis," *Human Rights Watch*, June 1, 2010, http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/06/01/pakistan-massacre-minority-ahmadis.
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] Ismail Khan, "Lahore carnage: Punjab still in state of denial," *Dawn.com*, May 30, 2010, http://dawn.com/2010/05/30/lahore-carnage-punjab-still-in-state-of-denial/.
[65] Ibid.
[66] "Pakistan: Massacre of Minority Ahmadis," *Human Rights Watch*, June 1, 2010, http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/06/01/pakistan-massacre-minority-ahmadis.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] "Sharif's statement on Ahmadis angers clerics," *The Express Tribune*, June 7, 2010, http://tribune.com.pk/story/19379/sharifs-statement-on-ahmadis-angers-clerics/.
[70] Ibid.

[71] Salman Taseer, "Twitter / SalmanTaseer: I was under huge pressure sure …" *Twitter*, December 30, 2010 (10:26 p.m.), https://twitter.com/SalmaanTaseer/status/20727524858273792.
[72] "Judge who sentenced governor's killer flees Pakistan," *TwoCircles.net*, October 26, 2011 (11:27 a.m.), http://twocircles.net/2011oct26/judge_who_sentenced_governors_killer_flees_pakistan.html.
[73] "Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Christian minorities minister, assassinated in Islamabad," *The Washington Post*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/shahbaz-bhatti-pakistans-christian-minorities-minister-assassinated-in-islamabad/2011/03/02/ABkkMKN_gallery.html#photo=1.
[74] Beena Sarwar, "Support Diep; Massacre in Lahore, some thoughts & responses," *Journeys to Democracy* (blog), May 30, 2010, http://beenasarwar.wordpress.com/2010/05/30/support-diep-massacre-in-lahore-some-thoughts-responses/.
[75] "Margaret Mead > Quotes," *Goodreads*, http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/61107.Margaret_Mead.

Chapter 19: Winning the Hearts

[76] The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion," *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, September 20, 2012, http://www.pewforum.org/Government/Rising-Tide-of-Restrictions-on-Religion-findings.aspx.
[77] Richard Leiby and Michele Langevine Leiby, "Taliban says it shot Pakistani teen for advocating girls' rights."
[78] "TIME's Person of the Year Issue: Cover Gallery: Runner-Up: Malala Yousafzai," *TIME*, December 19, 2012, http://poy.time.com/2012/12/19/times-person-of-the-year-issue-cover-gallery/slide/runner-up-malala-yousafzai/.
[79] Kari Huus, "Malala, teen champion of girls' rights, nominated for Nobel Peace Prize," *NBC News*, February 1, 2013 (8:16 p.m.), http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/02/01/16811670-malala-teen-champion-of-girls-rights-nominated-for-nobel-peace-prize.
[80] "Awarding of the Simone de Beauvoir Prize to Malala Yousafzai," *France Diplomatie*, January 9, 2013, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/global-issues/human-rights/women-s-rights/events-6401/article/awarding-of-the-simone-de-beauvoir.

The Last Beginning

CPSIA information can be obtained at www.ICGtesting.com
Printed in the USA
LVOW08s1455071014
407668LV00005B/72/P

THE WRONG KIND OF MUSLIM IS A CALL TO UNITE THOSE OF ALL FAITHS AND OF NO FAITH IN THE STRUGGLE FOR UNIVERSAL FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE. Since 9/11, terrorists in Pakistan have killed over 40,000—and counting. Often risking his life, Qasim Rashid journeys into the heart of that terrorism to unearth the untold story of those silenced by Taliban suicide bombings, secret police torture, and state sponsored religious persecution. Rashid exposes the horrifying truth about growing radicalism in Pakistan and its impact on Western security. But most importantly, Rashid uncovers the inspiring untold story of millions fighting back—and winning.

Qasim Rashid

"Rashid's heartfelt story compels admiration for him and a deeper appreciation for America's guarantee of religious freedom."

—The Honorable Tim Kaine, United States Senator

"A significant and alarming book that demands attention as a passionate call for peace and wide-ranging toleration."

—Baylor University Professor Dr. Philip Jenkins, Author of *Images of Terror: What We Can And Can't Know About Terrorism*

"A must-read for anyone who cares about human rights, humanity, freedom of expression, thought and conscience, not just in Pakistan but anywhere in the world."

—Pakistani Journalist and Filmmaker Beena Sarwar

QasimRashid.com
TheWrongKindOfMuslim
@MuslimIQ

$14.95
ISBN 978-0-9893977-0-4
95>
9 780
CYF

T2-CUG-725